



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

**Evaluation of two ECD services:
Licensing & Chartering Advice & Support;
Advice & Support to Licence-Exempt Playgroups**

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SUMMARY

This evaluation of two Early Childhood Development (ECD) services – licensing and chartering advice and support, and advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups – draws on interviews with Ministry of Education (MOE) national and regional staff, ECD national and regional staff, and early childhood centres, groups, parents and other individuals who have worked with ECD in these areas. It also draws on evidence from ECD’s publications, resources, the Document of Accountability between the Minister of Education and the Early Childhood Development Board, and monitoring reports. It describes similarities and differences in perspectives about the nature, purpose and impacts of ECD’s work, and factors associated with ECD’s effectiveness, to draw out themes and issues. The findings are discussed in the wider context of education policy developments.

Licensing and chartering advice and support

Both MOE and ECD staff regarded promotion of ‘quality’ as important aims of ECD’s licensing and chartering advice and support. However, there were differences between and within staff groups on how ECD could promote quality provision throughout their licensing and chartering advice and support. ECD staff saw quality as a crucial aspect of their advice and support from their first contact with groups and individuals, and showed how this could be promoted in relation to centre design, centre staffing and environmental design. Staff from one MOE management centre also thought that encouraging quality design for centre buildings, even where this went beyond the regulated requirements, was an important aspect of ECD’s advice. MOE staff in the other two management centres tended to see the goal for ECD of helping centres to meet regulated (and minimum) standards as the first step, with quality standards being achieved after this. MOE national staff were not explicit about how quality could be promoted by ECD staff, although they thought it was important that groups and individuals gained an understanding of the way the curriculum would be provided to achieve a quality service.

ECD staff noted there is no obligation on the part of groups and individuals to work with ECD or follow ECD’s advice. MOE itself is constrained in the extent to which it can require ‘quality’ design or staffing standards by the minimum standards set in regulation.

The issues that emerge from analysis of the material are:

- whether, in order for ECD and MOE to fully understand each other’s roles, it would be helpful for them to reach agreed understanding about aims of licensing and chartering in respect to quality provision;
- whether (and if so when) good standards should be set in regulation in respect to group size and design of space in relation to age groupings;
- how MOE’s licensing work can support ECD’s licensing and chartering advice and support, and vice versa;
- the high volunteer workload in respect to the community needs assessment process. A question is whether this could be reduced, e.g. by ECD becoming responsible for the needs assessment itself;

- how to bring together the planning capacity of MOE and ECD's expertise in community needs assessment. The Government is currently considering proposals in the long-term strategic plan for MOE to play an increased role in identifying gaps in provision of early childhood services and control of their establishment and closure.

There were common themes in MOE and ECD perspectives on factors associated with the effectiveness of ECD's work. These included:

- the importance of the quality of relationship between MOE and ECD, and whether there is a common framework of understanding of roles and responsibilities and interpretation of standards, including regulations;
- the nature of the contractual arrangement between ECD and MOE, and the extent to which this inhibits ECD responsiveness. In this respect, there does not seem to be an association between the Document of Accountability targets for licensed and chartered centres, and any assessment of unmet need in the community;
- the skills and understanding of ECD staff and the impact of their work, which were regarded as variable.

ECD pointed out that there is disjunction between the limited criteria for eligibility for the discretionary grants scheme, and the work of ECD staff to promote high standards of environmental design and sustainable organisational models that cater for the educational needs of children.

From the perspectives of centres, groups and individuals, ECD's advice and support could be improved by:

- provision of establishment grants, including funding to employ trained staff, before the centre receives bulk funding;
- consistent advice from MOE and ECD officials;
- reduction in volunteer workload;
- provision of more ECD resources, including an outline of all the tasks in becoming licensed and chartered, and resources to help with personnel management;
- improved early childhood education bulk funding levels.

MOE and ECD agreed that the cultural diversity and community development focus of ECD staff are strengths. They agreed that early childhood qualifications and experience provide a foundation for licensing and chartering advice and support, but ECD staff also noted that there is a high level of specialist knowledge required for this work. In one area experienced staff are being paired in a mentoring role with inexperienced staff to address training needs. Some staff are specialists, but many staff are working across a range of areas of work, and ECD staff regarded this as a detrimental practice. It did not enable staff members always to develop the depth of knowledge and skills required for this work, and led to some variability in quality.

National office ECD staff acknowledged that manuals and resources needed updating. ECD regional staff thought that resources to assist in the provision of advice and support about licensing and chartering needed to be extended, and to offer models of how centres and

organisational plans could be based on quality features. One ECD co-ordinator proposed that sample plans, sample staffing schedules, sample centre budgets related to operational models, environment resources and a centre management resource should be produced.

In respect of Pacific centres, MOE staff regarded the recruitment of Pacific staff to work with Pacific centres and groups as a strength. They also noted the need for technical expertise and for building capacity amongst staff.

MOE regional staff identified local issues and relationships, as well as ECD staffing, as factors in effectiveness of advice and support for Pacific centres:

- some unwillingness to comply with regulations, and differences in cultural values;
- close linkages with the church, leading in some instances to spending of government grants on the church rather than the early childhood centre;
- some criticism of quality of ECD's advice in respect of centre design;
- variable advice and support from ECD co-ordinators;
- limited understanding by Pacific centres of the total processes of licensing and chartering ;
- lack of viability of some Pacific centres, because the parents do not understand the full responsibilities of being licensed and chartered;
- widespread and diverse workload of ECD Pacific co-ordinators, making it hard for them to provide post-licensing support.

ECD outlined issues as:

- problems for centres being able to attract trained staff with Pacific languages and skills;
- letting of post-licensing and professional development contracts to other organisations, thus dispersing specialist knowledge amongst a variety of organisations;
- the time it takes to become licensed and chartered. The approach of ECD regional staff to licensing and chartering Pacific centres is to 'drip feed' information. Some groups take about 5 years to become licensed and chartered, with two of the groups in our sample taking 8 and 12 years respectively. Pacific co-ordinators have to translate many of ECD resources into Pacific languages.

An underlying theme of the evaluation was some tension between ECD and MOE, and the importance of good communication and a common framework of understanding. This was also raised in the Hunn and Cullen (2000) review of ECD Board. Issues were raised in our evaluation about the inflexibility of the Document of Accountability. Associated with this was the difficulty ECD staff have in being fully responsive to meeting community need for establishing new provision.

In addition, MOE is likely to have a future role in planning new provision, an area which intersects with ECD's current role in community needs assessment. This points to the desirability of reviewing the costs and benefits of the Document of Accountability, and the form of the relationship between ECD and MOE.

It is recommended that:

MOE and ECD could usefully meet to discuss:

- the development of systems for effective communication between ECD and MOE;
- frameworks of understanding about respective roles and responsibilities and common interpretations about standards;
- ways in which ECD can have input into policy development related to ECD's work;
- the merits of a contractual arrangement for licensing and chartering advice and support based on an assessment of unmet need for early childhood provision;
- whether there is value in reviewing the costs and benefits of the current Document of Accountability and the form of the relationship between ECD and MOE.

MOE with ECD's input:

- consider ways to address the issue of fragmentation in a service that requires a high level of specialist skill and supporting resources. This could include examination of the role of government in the provision of licensing and chartering advice and support and how this impacts on the way we think about contestability.
- consider including in the application form for discretionary grants, requirements to provide business plans and submission of building and organisational plans (to be assessed against quality standards);
- develop a consistent interpretation of regulations.

ECD with regional staff:

- in its working group on ECD resources and publications, could usefully consider developing a chart of tasks to be completed for licensing and chartering for parents and groups, sample plans, sample staffing schedules, sample centre budgets related to operational models, environment resources, and a centre management resource. Translation of resources into Pacific languages should be a priority.
- consider extending the arrangement for inexperienced staff to be mentored by an experienced colleague, particularly for Pacific staff. Consideration could also be given to how arrangements could be made for staff working on licensing and chartering to specialise in this work. Arrangements such as the employment of itinerant co-ordinators could be investigated.
- discuss internally whether the approach of 'drip feeding' information to Pacific groups is in the best interests of 'empowering' those groups, why Pacific groups are taking so long to become licensed and chartered, and whether the goals of licensing and chartering are desirable in all cases.

Advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups

There were differences in perspectives on the purposes of licence-exempt playgroups, with parents and ECD staff emphasising that playgroups are both parenting programmes and early childhood education services. MOE staff, while acknowledging the benefits of playgroups to parents, tended to focus their thinking on the educational aspects for children and the policy challenges in gauging ‘quality’ for children. Thus it would be useful for ECD and MOE to discuss the purpose of licence-exempt playgroups, and to incorporate the parenting benefits into any concept of ‘quality’, before thinking about appropriate indicators to use in gauging quality of licence-exempt playgroups.

Another question which needs to be included in the development of policy for licence-exempt playgroups is the meaning of ‘participation’ within a licence-exempt playgroup. The evidence in this evaluation is that attendance in playgroups may be infrequent and sporadic, because of the circumstances of the families themselves and the operation of the playgroup. Consideration of participation could usefully go beyond attendance measures, to include the extent to which parents are actively involved in the programme and make use of other services offered, such as ECD workshops and access to health and other services, when these are co-ordinated with the playgroup.

The absence of a high public profile for playgroups, and the limited knowledge and valuing of them by others, was a significant concern for ECD, who want to have meaningful involvement in policy making, so that grass roots understanding and experience make for good policy development. MOE acknowledged its limited knowledge of ECD’s work with playgroups and of how they operate, and appeared open to ECD involvement in policy development.

The value of playgroups emerged from parents’ and ECD’s perspectives as both a service offering early childhood education experience, and also an opportunity for parents to learn about their own children’s learning, to be supported by meeting with other families and learning things for themselves, and to take on community responsibilities by running the playgroup themselves.

Some playgroups have a special role in passing on language and culture and affording similar groups, such as rural parents, teenage mothers, refugees, immigrants and families in refuges, opportunities to get together. There are benefits to this type of programme, involving parents getting together in a group setting with their children, that cannot be realised in an individualised parenting programme.

The perceived impact of ECD’s advice and support was variable, and seemed to depend very much on the skills of ECD co-ordinator, the time the co-ordinator had available, and other factors such as the knowledge and resources of people within the playgroup. ECD’s community development approach and the employment of Pacific staff to work with Pacific playgroups and Maori staff to work with Maori playgroups were seen as strengths. However, it was regarded as extremely important that the co-ordinator held an early childhood qualification, had experience in working in early childhood services, and was offered ongoing professional development and support. ECD resources and publications were regarded as a strength. In the views of ECD regional staff and parents, it would be helpful to extend them.

Factors within ECD environment, the government policy framework and the wider public value system were perceived as significant influences on ECD's capacity to work effectively with playgroups and on families' capacity to participate. ECD regional staff felt constrained by:

- some working conditions, such as high workload, limited administrative support, low pay rates within their collective agreement, and limited access for some staff to professional development pitched to their need;
- the impact of contestable contracts, which has weakened their capacity to deliver an effective service;
- the inflexibility of the Document of Accountability, inhibiting the work areas they would like to be involved in.

ECD national staff felt inhibited by:

- inadequate resource levels for ECD's work;
- lack of valuing and funding of licence-exempt playgroups;
- issues of poverty and lack of venues in some areas.

Parents would like to have more resources and hands-on contact with ECD.

Parents and ECD staff strongly supported additional funding to enable ECD to offer more hands-on visits and workshops, publish national and local newsletters, and develop further resources. The work ECD is able to undertake in a few visits every year does not provide opportunities for realising the full potential of trained teachers offering action-based learning within an early childhood education programme. Extension of work may require additional funding to ECD within its Document of Accountability.

It is recommended that:

- MOE and ECD set up a working group/work together to develop an agreed understanding of the concept of 'quality' in a licence-exempt playgroup, integrating within the 'quality' concept an understanding of parenting benefits and of 'intensity' of participation. ECD could use this to further develop their own benchmarks of good practice, and it could be one of the concepts underpinning the Document of Accountability;
- MOE review the funding of licence-exempt playgroups and ECD's role in providing the support structure for these groups, recognising both the early childhood education and parental development aspects;
- ECD consider ways to strengthen its resource and publications arm, in order to develop further high quality resources and extend its publications for licence-exempt playgroups;
- MOE involve ECD in the development of policy related to licence-exempt playgroups, and in the wider policy area of parental development.

General recommendations:

That MOE research contracts be offered in the following two areas:

- (a) the definition of quality in licence-exempt playgroups;
- (b) a Pacific early childhood evaluation to explore the factors contributing to achievement of quality and sustainability for Pacific centres and playgroups.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to carry out an evaluation of two Early Childhood Development (ECD) services: Licensing and Chartering Advice and Support, and Advice and Support to Licence-Exempt Playgroups, except nga Puna Kohungahunga (ECD Maori playgroups). The study did not include consideration of nga Puna Kohungahunga because of the small number of these playgroups (40 out of a total of 758 playgroups at July 2000), and their relatively recent establishment. The evaluation investigated the quality and outcomes of the work that ECD has done in these two areas.

In 2000, Don Hunn and Joy Cullen were contracted to review ECD in order to establish ECD's operational position from an ownership perspective, and to advise on significant issues which might impact on ECD's capacity, capability and viability. This followed a submission to the Minister of Education from ECD, which indicated that there were problems over ECD's ability to remain within existing funding levels without reducing levels of service. ECD had proposed restructuring to address problems, a move that had concerned the Ministry of Education (MOE). At the time, there were also differences of opinion between MOE and ECD on whether certain of ECD's financial management practices were acceptable.

Further, terms of reference of the Hunn and Cullen review included an assessment of the professional contribution of ECD to the development of the early childhood sector, and an examination of the relationship between ECD and MOE. Both these areas are relevant to our current evaluation, which was initiated on the basis of the review's conclusion that the absence of evaluative data on ECD's services meant that it had been difficult to assess the quality of its services (Hunn and Cullen, 2000, p.34). The Hunn and Cullen review noted that ECD itself is not resourced to undertake research and evaluation, and that there is scope for an evaluation function to be built into ECD's programme requirements.

Parameters for the evaluation were developed by MOE in collaboration with ECD. Objectives of this work were as follows:

Licensing and chartering advice and support

- describe the services that licensing and chartering advice and support provides;
- identify the intended and actual outcomes of licensing and chartering advice and support;
- identify how well this advice and support is provided;
- identify the barriers that impact on achieving outcomes.

Licence-exempt playgroups

- investigate what services ECD provides to playgroups, i.e. what is delivered and how it is delivered;
- identify the intended and actual outcomes of licence-exempt services provided by ECD;

- identify how well this advice and support is provided;
- identify the barriers that impact on achieving outcomes.

The government has two broad policy objectives for early childhood education. These are:

- to improve access to, participation in and quality in early childhood education;
- to reduce disparities in participation in quality early childhood education between Maori and non-Maori, and Pacific and non-Pacific children.

In discussing our evaluation proposal, MOE officials described licensing and chartering as a key plank for the government's policy initiatives. They said that 'improving quality' is sometimes defined through licensing and chartering, but this status may not necessarily bring 'quality'. Both MOE and ECD were interested in getting information on views of 'quality', barriers to licensing and chartering, especially for Pacific groups, and whether becoming licensed and chartered lowers their participation. There was an interest in how ECD delivers its services, and in consistency in standards between ECD and MOE.

In discussing the licence-exempt playgroups, MOE and ECD were interested in what is meant by 'quality' in a licence-exempt playgroup, and in what way ECD 'adds value' to the administration, the programme and support for parenting.

Government structures

ECD is a crown entity, established during the administrative reforms of education on 1 October 1989. *Before Five* (Lange, 1989, p.13) stated that 'The Early Childhood Development Unit will be a free-standing, self-administering body'. ECD was to be accountable through the general manager to MOE through a contract (the Document of Accountability) negotiated between the two agencies. ECD would be fully funded by MOE for the first two years (this was extended to three years) and then be required to charge for some of its services.

In relation to this evaluation, ECD has responsibility for providing advice and support on licensing and chartering. It is not the sole contractor providing this service, as contestable contracts have been won by some other organisations. In respect of licence-exempt playgroups, it has responsibility for administering the Developing Centres Fund (which offers roll-based funding and some one-off grants), and providing advice and support to playgroups. This does not include licence-exempt kohanga reo or most licence-exempt playcentres.

ECD is linked with MOE through its Document of Accountability and through its relationships at national and regional levels. Its areas of work intersect with those of MOE at various important points. ECD provides licensing and chartering advice and support. MOE is responsible for the actual licensing and chartering. ECD assists groups and individuals to apply for discretionary grants. MOE is responsible for setting the criteria for the grants, determining eligibility and making the grants. Once centres are licensed, MOE is responsible for identifying those 'at risk' of losing their licence and identifying providers, including ECD, to work with these centres.

The discretionary grants scheme is designed to:

- provide assistance for the capital cost of establishing new centres;
- improve or increase the capacity of existing centres;
- provide assistance to establish Pacific early childhood centres;
- provide assistance for planning a project.

There are three pools of funding for the discretionary grants scheme: Maori pool, General pool and Pacific pool. The sizes of the three pools have grown over the last three years. The Maori pool has gone from \$1.8m in 1997/98 to \$2.4m in 2000/01; the Pacific pool has gone from \$1m in 1997/98 to \$2.750m in 2000/01, and the General pool has gone from \$2.885m in 1997/98 to \$3.685m in 2000/01. Centres applying under the General and Maori pool are turned down for two main reasons:

- some applicants are ineligible;
- the number of eligible applicants exceeds the amount of funding for the allocation.

In 2000/2001, as at 31 March 2001, 100% of Pacific groups whom ECD had supported to apply for a grant had received it.

ECD is solely responsible for funding and supporting licence-exempt playgroups. MOE plays a minimal role with regard to playgroups themselves, except in policy advice.

Policy work in the early childhood education sector is of direct interest to ECD. In the review of ECD, it was noted (Hunn and Cullen, 2001, p.13) that while ECD does not have a policy function, it has the opportunity to inform the Minister of trends and issues in the sector through its responsibility to provide information to the Minister. The report highlighted ECD's concern that it does not have a direct policy role and is not a member of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee, and MOE's view that ECD, as a government agency, is not eligible to be a member of this committee. However, it stated that MOE provides committee minutes and agendas so that ECD is informed, although ECD thought this information came too late for change. Some difficulties in communication between MOE and ECD were noted.

Some of the reasons for disjunctions in understanding were seen by Hunn and Cullen to reside in 'the long term history of tension originating in differing perceptions of the role of ECD and in challenges to the introduction of contestability in 1992' (Hunn and Cullen, 2001, p.20). One area of tension was seen to be contestability. ECD managers thought that operational time had been wasted in applying for contestable contracts, when MOE had not clearly signaled that ECD would not be considered for them. MOE, on the other hand, considered that ECD should be prepared to move from an area of provision when local expertise had been developed.

Understanding the causes of these differences may assist the two organisations in moving forward.

At the same time as this evaluation was being done, a separate evaluation of ECD's Awhina Matua services was also being carried out by a different research group. Awhina Matua is aimed at supporting Maori and Pacific families with children under age 5 to have their children

participate in early childhood education. There is an apparent policy connection between the Awhina Matua service, and ECD's work with licence-exempt playgroups and in licensing and chartering. Both involve intensive work with families and communities. Any policy considerations arising from both evaluations could be made together.

Wider context

This evaluation was done when the government was working with the early childhood sector on a strategic plan for early childhood education for the next ten years. In the final report of the strategic plan working group to the Minister of Education released in October 2001, proposals were made that, if adopted, would have an impact on the work of ECD and MOE. These include:

- making classrooms available for licence-exempt groups and parenting programmes;
- strengthening centres in their first year or two;
- revising the discretionary grants scheme;
- reviewing regulations, including ratios and group size, and ensuring appropriate spaces are available for groups within centres;
- recognising the way licence-exempt groups meet quality, without posing unnecessary compliance costs on them;
- planning the provision of early childhood services;
- creating collaborative relationships and improving programme and agency co-ordination between early childhood services and other social services;
- creating mechanisms to support services provided by whanau and parents, such as providing an itinerant teacher.

MOE's policy programme, arising from the long term strategic plan, would need to include support and planning for early childhood provision and goals and achievement of 'quality' in parent-led services.

The evaluation also coincided with the discussion and implementation of MOE's (2001) *Pasifika Education Plan*. Two of its sub-goals have direct relevance to ECD's work. These are to:

- increase Pacific children's participation in early childhood education;
- increase the number and quality of Pacific early childhood education services.

These sub-goals are to be achieved by working towards increasing the number of licensed and chartered services in the next five years, by licensing and chartering at least 15 Pacific early childhood centres annually.

Many of the issues raised in this evaluation are relevant to what is happening in this wider context.

2. DESCRIPTIONS OF ECD PROVISIONS

ECD structures

In January and February 2001, ECD restructured its local office administration and management by creating administration support and team managers in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, and Christchurch.

ECD employs 94 staff, of whom 35 are Maori, 19 are Pacific and 40 are Pakeha or other ethnic group. Of the 94 staff, 78 (83%) are involved in direct delivery and support, including 14 Pacific co-ordinators working to provide support and advice to licence-exempt Pacific Islands Early Childhood Groups (PIECGs) and centres working toward becoming licensed and chartered. ECD publishes a yearly report of their Pacific services which is prepared by the National Manager: Pacific Islands.

Two ECD working groups of experienced co-ordinators, with an ECD regional manager as chairperson, were established in August 2001 to develop proposals on how ECD could enhance the quality of its licensing and chartering advice and support, and the quality of its advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups respectively. These working groups have held initial meetings, and identified barriers to quality service provision. They are currently making recommendations on packages of measures and processes to improve the quality of ECD's services in these areas.

ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support work

ECD is contracted to provide licensing and chartering advice and support under its Document of Accountability. The work is expected to achieve the government's goals of increasing participation in quality early childhood services. Targets are set for each year for General, Pacific and Maori groups.

The Document of Accountability

The 2000 and 2001 document of accountability between the Minister of Education and the Early Childhood Development Board describes the 'Licensing and Chartering Advice and Support' output as:

ECD staff advise and support individuals and groups establishing and operating early childhood education centres to meet licensing and chartering requirements. The intensity of the service provided is tailored to the needs of the centre and the community it serves. For instance, assisting Pacific peoples' centres to become licensed and chartered is regarded as a first step towards upgrading the quality of provision for children from the Pacific community.

The Licensing and Chartering Output budget for 2001 is \$781,000. The purpose (outcome) is 'more children participate in community licensed and chartered early childhood education services'. This is a shift from the 2000 output targets, which did not specify 'community' services. The agreement specifies 'products', which require ECD to provide advice and support

on demand to individuals and groups, and targets for areas of work (number of community groups with whom ECD works, number of community groups reaching full licensing, probationary licensing and chartering, supported to Discretionary Grants Funding, and receiving hours under the 'At Risk Centres Intervention Strategy', with quarterly reporting). It also specifies methods, key performance indicators and quality indicators.

A copy of the output agreement for licensing and chartering services is attached as Appendix I.

In its 'Third Quarterly Report 2000/2001' (ECD, 2001a, pp.28-34), ECD set out how well it was achieving these targets for each of these groups (three-quarters of the way through the financial year). It reported that as at 31 March 2001, it had worked with 168 general groups, exceeding its annual target of 120-140 groups. It had exceeded its targets of new groups and of total children's places, and was well on track for helping its target number of groups reach probationary licence. It noted that the demand for licensing and chartering advice and support had exceeded that anticipated in early 2000.

ECD's work with respect to Pacific groups was less successful. ECD had worked with 28 Pacific groups, but said that it found it difficult to move groups to the next stage of development. Two of the expected 6 groups had received probationary status, and 4 of a target of 6 groups had reached full licence status. Only 55 licensed places had been created out of a target of 150-175. All the groups which ECD supported to apply for a discretionary grant were successful.

In the previous financial year, 1999-2000, ECD had worked with 32 Pacific groups towards licensing and chartering. As a result, 6 groups had achieved probationary status, 5 groups had achieved full licensing and 182 new licensed places for children were created. ECD supported 17 groups to access discretionary grants funding.

ECD's licence-exempt advice and support work

Licence-exempt playgroups are exempt from statutory licensing requirements provided they meet ECD's criteria for establishment and operation. As at 31 March 2001, ECD was working with 628 playgroups, 41 of which were new groups. There were 16,427 children participating. ECD had surpassed its targets for number of groups (600) and number of children participating.

In the year ended 30 June 2001, ECD had worked with a total of 179 PIECGs: Samoan (84), Tongan (41), Cook Islands (24), Niuean (18), Tokelauan (8), Fijian (2) and Tuvaluan (2). Of these, 51 were new groups, and these centres were catering for 2,495 children and their families. ECD had met (and in some cases surpassed) its targets for the year.

ECD document of accountability for 2001 to 2002 describes the 'Licence-exempt playgroup output' as:

Playgroups are early childhood education services exempt from licensing provided they meet certain criteria. They are the major forms of early childhood education outside of the home for children in the 0-3 age group. Playgroups support parents in their role as early childhood educators, and provide a focus for communities especially in rural areas where families have

limited or no access to support services, and in areas where labour market participation is low. These groups provide a service for approximately 7,000 children and their families.

The output budget is \$2,404,000. The stated outcomes for this work are that children have the opportunity to have play experiences facilitated by their parents in a community based group environment that meets ECD quality criteria. The agreement specifies products as parents being assisted to form a group, to manage a co-operative and flexible group at nominal costs, and for ECD to work with up to 800 groups (including Nga Puna Kohungahunga and Pacific Islands groups), at least 300 of which are to receive intensive support and 20% of which are to be new groups.

A copy of the output agreement for licence-exempt services is attached as Appendix II.

3. METHODOLOGY

This report provides an evaluation of ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support and an evaluation of ECD's services to licence-exempt playgroups.

Data collected for the analysis is drawn from:

- documentation about ECD supported services and about ECD's work, including publications, the Document of Accountability and monitoring reports;
- interviews with MOE staff, ECD staff and participants in programmes.

The resulting analysis used programme logic to provide:

- a description of the commonalities and differences in perceptions of participants which could affect ECD work in these two services;
- identification of themes and issues;
- development of models of goals and contributing factors for licensing and chartering advice and support and for licence-exempt playgroups.

Programme logic is the '*theory about the causal linkages among the various components of a programme: its resources and activities, its outputs, its short term impacts and long term outcomes...making a programme's theory of action explicit is the first step towards testing its validity*' (Funnell, 1997, p.5). It is a method of describing and analysing material relating to programme development and delivery, and providing a clear summary for evaluation purposes (amongst others). It has been used extensively in the evaluation of Australian public sector programmes.

Programme logic was used in the evaluation to frame the interview questions (Interview schedules are attached as Appendix III) and to ensure that our data gathering covered key factors that are likely to affect ECD's service provision. In particular, these were ECD's staffing, resources, systems and organisational features and external factors such as the broader education policy context, linkages with MOE, ECD's Document of Accountability with the Minister of Education, ECD's funding and the relationship with other service providers operating in the field. We wanted to develop a cohesive picture of how these factors interact to affect ECD's service provision. We therefore designed our measures to gather information from a variety of sources to cover these areas.

Our interviews were held with the three groups that are most involved in the provision of ECD services: ECD staff, MOE staff, and the staff, parents and individuals who had received ECD's services. Within each of these groupings were sub-groupings. Our triangulation of interview data enabled us to capture and lay open views from different perspectives. We used programme logic to provide a structure for comparing data from the interviews to show differences and similarities in perception about the outcomes of ECD's work for these two services in terms of goals and impacts and the factors that influence ECD's effectiveness. This enabled us to identify themes and issues.

We then developed programme logic models of goals/outcomes for each of the two ECD services which show desired goals and their linkages with factors.

The sample

There were two components to the evaluation: an evaluation of licensing and chartering advice and support, and an evaluation of advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups. Overlying these components were the common organisational frameworks of ECD and MOE.

Interviews for the evaluation of licensing and chartering advice and support gathered perspectives from different people and groups involved in ECD's work on licensing and chartering: ECD and MOE (national and regional); parents and staff in licensed and chartered centres who had received ECD's advice and support to become licensed and chartered within the previous two years; and people or groups currently receiving licensing and chartering advice and support.

Interviews for the evaluation of ECD's advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups gathered perspectives from ECD and MOE staff (national and regional), and parents involved in licence-exempt playgroups.

We carried out interviews with the following individuals and groups:

- a group interview of two national ECD staff;
- a group interview of four national MOE staff;
- four individual interviews with ECD staff in the Auckland regional office;
- two individual interviews and one group interview of three ECD staff in the Lower Hutt regional office;
- a group interview of four ECD staff in the Christchurch regional office;
- a group interview of three MOE staff in the Auckland management centre;
- a group interview of four MOE staff in the Lower Hutt management centre;
- a group interview of two MOE staff in the Christchurch management centre;
- group interviews with representatives from seven licensed and chartered centres who had received ECD advice and support. Two of these were in Auckland, two in Wellington and two in Christchurch. Although we had asked ECD for the sample to be of community based services, two were private centres. We were not aware of this until we did the interviews. Three of the centres were Pacific centres: a Tokelauan centre, a Samoan centre and a Tongan centre. One was a faith-based centre. The other three were general centres;
- individual or group interviews with seven groups/individuals who were wanting to establish a licensed and chartered centre and were receiving ECD advice and support. Two of these were in Auckland, two in Wellington and two in Christchurch. Three were Pacific groups: a Pukapukan group and two Samoan groups. The others were representatives of church groups

(2), an established centre planning a new centre with changed operating times on school grounds, and a representative of a government organisation wanting to set up childcare facilities for staff;

- group interviews of parents from 12 licence-exempt playgroups. Four of these were in Auckland, four in Northland and four in Buller. Northland and Buller were chosen because they were ‘deep rural’ areas. We asked ECD to recommend a range of groups, including some that ECD perceived to be ‘struggling’, some perceived to be doing ‘moderately well’, and some perceived to be ‘successful’.

We asked to interview MOE and ECD staff who had an overview of, or who worked directly in, licensing and chartering; and secondly, who had an overview of, or who worked directly in, providing advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups. Unfortunately ECD Pacific Islands Ta’ita’i Pasifika was not available for interview.

We tape recorded interviews with national ECD and MOE staff and returned the transcripts to them for checking. We tape recorded but did not transcribe interviews for other participants, gave them information sheets and asked them to sign consent forms (Appendix IV). Where it was viable, we sent out interview schedules in advance. The short time frame for this evaluation meant that early interviews were arranged at short notice.

4. ADVICE AND SUPPORT ON LICENSING AND CHARTERING

Differences between licensing and chartering

A licence is granted if the standards set in the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations (1990) are met. These regulations set out minimum health and safety standards and curriculum, management and staffing standards. However, the first licence is a probationary licence and is issued for a maximum of 12 months. It becomes a full licence after MOE liaison officers have verified that the centre complies with the standards of the early childhood regulations, the educational components of the licensing requirements are being implemented, administrative systems are well established and adequate, and the service is operating effectively.

To be eligible for bulk funding, a service must also be chartered. A chartered early childhood service must meet the Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs). The purpose of the DOPs is to establish national criteria for quality early childhood education. It draws on Te Whāriki to set out guiding principles on a partnership model to promote and extend children's learning and development, and on implementation of the curriculum. Three areas of work are detailed within the DOPs, namely 'Learning and Development', 'Communication and Consultation', and 'Operation and Administration'.

A key difference between the early childhood regulations and the DOPs is that the former prescribes minimum standards, while the latter sets out educational practices that are associated with a quality learning environment. In verifying that a centre meets licensing standards and approving a probationary licence, MOE assesses the centre against the minimum standards set in regulation and is not able to require higher standards than these.

Perspectives on nature and purpose of ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support

MOE national staff

MOE national staff described ECD as a crown agency working on behalf of MOE to give practical advice and support to groups or individuals seeking to be licensed and chartered. The end point would be successful licensing and chartering with 'no surprises' for MOE when it went to license the service. The process would include provision of good information, and setting of goals and timeframes. At an early stage, those seeking advice and support would be well enough informed to be able to make a sound decision on whether they were going to progress or not to the point of licensing.

Underpinning ECD work on licensing and chartering would be a focus on developing a quality service in a safe environment. This would require emphasis on curriculum provision. MOE national staff regarded licensing as part of a process in achieving high quality curriculum delivery. Licensing would be located within a broader quality framework, and groups and individuals seeking licensing would gain a concept of the way that the curriculum would be

provided to achieve a quality service. When services were licensed, they would be ready to *move towards more of the DOPs [Desirable Objectives and Practices] end of the spectrum rather than the number of compliances end of the spectrum*¹. ECD's advice and support would provide assurance that the service would be quality provision.

MOE management centre staff

MOE management centre staff took a pragmatic view, emphasising that short term goals were to inform people of the reality of what is required to become licensed and chartered, and then to get centres up and running and meeting licensing standards. Staff from one management centre said that the first step was to *provide enough information for groups to decide whether or not to proceed*. In two management centres, quality did not feature in discussion of short term goals. A focus for all management centre staff was whether or not centres complied with licensing standards when MOE was called in for the first licensing check.

There was an acknowledgement by staff in the other management centre that in working towards licensing, attention needed to be paid to quality standards. These staff members noted that the regulated building requirements are *minimum* ones and, when followed to the letter, have in one instance resulted in unsatisfactory buildings and limited spaces. They were critical of ECD in allowing such plans to be put through. While MOE staff are able only to require the regulatory standards to be met, implicit in this criticism of ECD, was a view that ECD staff should encourage high building and design standards in their work with groups and individuals.

Long term goals were described by staff in two management centres as sustainability, quality and statutory compliance of the service. Staff in the other management centre described ECD as *continuously working with the groups/individuals to beyond the minimum level for chartering. We would have a professionally vibrant, self-reviewing, self-monitoring, confident early childhood sector*. In part they thought this was achieved through licensing and chartering advice and support, and in part through professional development contracts. In a further, rather contradictory statement, they said they thought there was a distinction between supporting groups to meet the regulations, and supporting their development. This perceived distinction contrasts with ECD's way of working, which integrates the functions of supporting both reaching regulatory standards *and* development, as part of their licensing and chartering advice and support.

ECD national staff

ECD national staff put greater emphasis on quality, as both a short and long term aim of ECD's work, than MOE management centre staff. Understandably, since ECD is the service provider, they also gave a more extensive description of ECD's work and elaborated on how it related to *quality*. They described ECD as offering a free government service, available nationally through local offices, for individuals, groups and organisations wanting to establish a licensed early childhood centre:

¹ Italics are used for quotes from interviewees.

The purpose of that work is to ensure that groups meet all requirements related to buildings, furnishings, outdoor areas, staffing, operational, financial and management policies and early childhood curriculum. The advice is to ensure that education, health and safety of the children are paramount. Te Whāriki is the curriculum base for the advice.

ECD staff said advice also includes information about applications for discretionary grants, funds for capital development, education bulk funding and the childcare subsidy. The advice and support on discretionary grants is an important aspect of their work with community centres, which are the focus in ECD's 2001/2002 Document of Accountability.

Like MOE staff, ECD staff wanted to ensure that when centres sign off as being ready for licensing, they are ready and able to operate. In their view, this would require a culturally appropriate and educationally sound service, with strong management policies underpinning the operation. In the long term, services would continue to develop as centres of learning within the community. They regarded long term goals as better educational outcomes for children across a range of domains. High educational standards would also be beneficial to parents, who could go into paid work or take part in other activities assured that their children were being well educated.

They considered signs of success would be *high quality early childhood services for children, staff and parents and long term financially viable operation of centres*; recognition of expertise; MOE seeking ECD's advice in policy development; and no complaints about ECD's service. Centres would understand the rationale for standards, for example, why good staff:child ratios are beneficial, and aim for better than regulated standards. There would be high quality environments, including physical environments.

ECD regional staff

Like national staff, ECD regional staff emphasised the importance of quality, viability and responsiveness. They said they tailored their advice and support so that centres would provide quality provision, not just minimum standards. Comment was made that often people wanting to establish a licensed and chartered centre do not have a good understanding of early childhood education. ECD staff thought that getting across issues regarding quality provision and an understanding of what is involved in becoming licensed was a key aspect of ECD's role.

One co-ordinator thought a short term goal is to help groups/individuals realistically assess whether they want to establish a licensed and chartered centre. As a result of the assessment, they may decide not to become licensed and chartered. Some reasons for making this decision could be better understanding of what being a licensed and chartered centre means, the scope of the work to establish a centre, and understanding how the early childhood education system operates. This staff member saw a conflict between generating informed decision-making and the Document of Accountability, which emphasises the goal of licensing and sets specific targets.

ECD staff described their specific advice and support as:

- helping groups establish community need by suggesting ways to survey the community and to obtain demographic information and information about existing centres in the area;
- explaining the rules and regulations covering early childhood services, including health and safety requirements, and the Early Childhood Regulations;
- explaining and discussing the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices and Te Whāriki;
- explaining the early childhood funding system and entitlements (bulk funding, childcare subsidy, discretionary grants);
- giving specific advice on building design, potential sites and playground development, discussing the needs of infants, toddlers and young children and curriculum delivery in relation to space and centre layout, discussing the needs of staff and adults for adult space. Most of the staff we interviewed suggested that groups/individuals visit centres that had good building designs. ECD staff also had a selection of photographs from established centres of layout in different areas, such as nappy changing and areas of play. These were used as exemplars and to demonstrate possible approaches. ECD staff visited potential sites, discussed plans and worked with the architect where appropriate;
- discussing equipment and providing an equipment list;
- working through staffing schedules in relation to hours of operation and numbers and ages of children. In this respect, ECD staff said they pay a lot of attention to the importance of good staff: child ratios, small group size, and staff qualifications, which they encourage to be better than regulation;
- helping to establish realistic budgets and fee structures and to apply for discretionary grants;
- assisting groups and individuals to liaise with outside agencies, e.g. NZ Fire Service, city or district council, Public Health Unit;
- helping to develop policies, e.g. on equal employment opportunities, staff employment, health and safety, transition to school;
- helping to develop a centre charter;
- helping to develop good administrative and management systems;
- assisting with the employment of staff, by advising on tax and employment legislation, helping with job descriptions, advertising, acting as an advisor on appointment panels.

Staff said they vary the way in which they work according to the perceived need of the group/individuals seeking advice and support. For example, some may be new to the sector and require a lot of basic understanding, while others may already have experience of establishing a centre.

Post-licensing advice and support varies. Centres can work under ECD hat through the probationary year, but some services do not need or do not want further ECD advice and support, if they receive support from a well-managed umbrella organisation such as a kindergarten association.

Groups and individuals receiving ECD support and advice

Groups and individuals who had received or were receiving licensing and chartering advice and support described ECD's work with them. It is clear that the advice and support is tailored to the needs of different groups/organisations, and the focus can be narrow or wide-ranging. All respondents said they had extensive advice and support on buildings, design of space in relation to children's educational needs, equipment, and rules and regulations. Those that did not receive advice and support on other important aspects were groups that already had experience in the areas under consideration, e.g. two were existing centres establishing a new building and changing their operation.

The six general services that had recently become licensed and chartered said they received a range of advice and support, which related to their needs, as follows:

- advice on building design, layout, environment (5)
- administration and management systems (5)
- quality and the early childhood curriculum (4)
- staffing (4)
- funding, quality rates, budgeting and costs (4)
- consents and liaison with outside organisations (4)
- policy and charter development (4)
- staff employment (3)
- applications for discretionary grants (3)
- referral to look at other centres (2)
- equipment (2)
- how to assess community need and a list of other services in the area (1).

This frequency ordering may give some indication of ECD's priorities in advice and support. Quality is fairly high up the list, coming second to essential areas related to fulfilling regulatory requirements.

ECD work with four general groups

To give some idea of how ECD work with groups interested in licensing and chartering can vary, we provide descriptions of ECD's work with four general groups that were working towards being licensed and chartered.

Centre A

One centre was being established by a government organisation and one person had responsibility for it. She was looking at various options, i.e. leasing places in existing centres, relocating a building, building from scratch, and purchasing an existing building. Her brief was to investigate provision of childcare and to consider out of school care. She had worked for three months on the project. In this time she had received ECD booklets, a copy of Te Whāriki, and advice on surveying community need, including obtaining demographic information and finding information on other services in the area (ECD provided a list of other services). ECD co-ordinator had discussed financial management, regulations, curriculum, personnel management, staff qualifications and ratios and staffing models in relation to building and centre organisation.

ECD co-ordinator offered to lend a book on design of spaces, had looked at possible sites with the person responsible, and discussed and suggested changes to specific building designs. She had provided access to photos and centres to visit in order to consider ideas for design and layout and had recommended that an architect be used to plan the outdoor area. She emphasised quality in all her discussions. Management structures were also discussed.

Centre B

A second existing community based centre was establishing a new and bigger service with different operating times on a school site. It had done a survey and obtained demographic information through a researcher on the parent committee. The parents said they had not needed ECD advice on this, or on some other things, because of the expertise of parents, including an accountant, a solicitor, the researcher and an electrician. Their first application for a discretionary grant in July 1999 was unsuccessful. MOE advised them that this was because of the limited pool. They were allocated the grant 6 months later, because another group had not spent their grant. They did not need to resubmit an application. ECD worked extensively with them on building design, suggesting they visit centres for ideas on layout (ECD provided a list of centres) and photograph areas they liked. ECD co-ordinator worked with them on a design brief and discussed gaps in the brief, provided information on architects already working with MOE, met with the architect, discussed quality issues in relation to design, lent a book on outdoor space, and discussed spaces for adults. She provided management advice and liaised closely with the Ministry of Health, Specialist Education Services and MOE.

Centre C

The third was an existing centre that had been evicted from its building and wanted to plan a new centre and extend its operation. It had worked with ECD for 2.5 years. The main focus of advice was on building and funding. ECD co-ordinator explained the discretionary grants scheme and also suggested an application to the region's Savings Bank for the outdoor environment and whiteware, which was successful. She discussed resource consent requirements, suggested other centres to visit for ideas about design, showed photographs of layout, gave specific advice on the building plans, including the positioning of the centre on the site, and gave advice on equipment, flooring, ratios and quality staffing. The centre was due to be opened a week after our interview.

Centre D

The fourth was an individual working on behalf of a church organisation. She was an experienced kindergarten teacher and felt she did not need advice on quality and Te Whāriki. ECD had given her ECD booklets and had provided valuable help in working on specific plans and building issues. She had written an application for a discretionary grant and this was ready to be posted. She thought the next steps were to get resource consent and to have more advice on costs and budgeting.

Issues arising from perspectives on outcomes of licensing and chartering advice and support

Differences occur both within MOE and ECD staff groups and between staff groups from ECD and MOE. Perspectives of those receiving ECD's advice and support confirm aspects of the work that ECD says it does.

Everyone agrees that promoting quality is an element of ECD's work and that quality provision is what we should be aiming for. But there are different views on the *priority* that ECD places or should place on consideration of 'quality' in the process of providing licensing and chartering advice and support. There are differences between national and regional MOE staff as well as between MOE and ECD staff. There also seem to be differences in the depth of understanding of how consideration of 'quality' can be fostered right from the start of ECD's work.

MOE national staff saw a 'quality strand' as part of ECD's work, leading up to licensing and chartering. They were not explicit about how this is realised in practice.

Staff from two of the three MOE management centres tended to give 'quality' predominance later in a centre's process and after licensing had occurred. 'Successful licensing and chartering' to these MOE management centre staff was that centres met the licensing requirements when they first applied. This position reflects MOE's obligation to license against regulatory requirements. MOE staff from the third management centre put forward a view that ECD staff should work with groups and individuals to encourage quality in building and environmental design from the start. This tallied with ECD's stated position.

For ECD staff, 'quality' was a crucial aspect of their advice and support from the first contact. In our sample it was always discussed as part of ECD's initial discussion with groups and individuals. The regional staff described how they worked to build an understanding of quality. They demonstrated that consideration of structural quality and process quality was embedded in their advice and support. Therefore they talked early on about the importance of trained staff, good staff:child ratios and small group sizes, and encouraged an aim of better than regulated standards. They explained how a well designed environment can provide good contexts to support children's learning, and the difference that can be made to the environment by good centre design and use of space. They tried to generate understanding rather than rote agreement so that the groups and individuals could make informed decisions. Being 'ready and able to operate' was an important goal, but not the only goal.

The perspectives of those who received advice and support show a match with what ECD said they did in respect to quality. They also indicated some of the different ways in which ECD works with centres, groups and individuals.

These differences in perspectives raise questions for consideration.

- In order for MOE and ECD to understand and appreciate each other's roles, it may be helpful for them to reach agreed understanding about how licensing and chartering advice and support can encourage quality provision. If so, how can this happen?
- The features of building design and environmental design that are established in new centres are enduring. It would seem useful, therefore, in establishing new centres to give careful consideration to the impact of these design features on curriculum delivery and the children, staff and adults who work there. However, since standards for these features are not set in regulation, MOE is not in a position to insist on them. There are also financial implications in achieving some 'quality' features. These considerations highlight a tension between the

government goals of quality provision for early childhood education and the absence of regulations for use of space in relation to ages of children, group sizes and ratios.

- How can we raise expectations/requirements that new centres will aim for quality provision? Should different higher regulatory requirements be set for new centres with respect to group size and design of space in relation to age groupings? The early childhood education long term strategic plan proposes a review of ratios and group size as part of regulation. It stated, 'Ratios and group size would be tied to more developmentally appropriate regulations on the use of space in centres' (Early Childhood Education Long Term Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001, p.22).
- It is likely that, following a review of regulations, the government would set higher regulations for group size and use of space. Existing centres may then be faced with the costly and time-consuming tasks of modifying existing buildings. In the interests of quality and effective planning, it would seem useful to set higher regulations for new buildings as soon as a new framework for this can be developed. This could precede the regulatory review or be given urgency within the review timeframe. The long term strategic plan proposes that the review would not be implemented until 2004.
- How can MOE's licensing work support ECD's prior work, and vice versa? How can ECD ensure that when a group or individual applies to be licensed, it meets MOE criteria? These two related questions point to a need for good communication and shared understanding about standards, expectations and processes between MOE and ECD at a regional level. To an extent, the issue of ECD's ability to assist groups and individuals to meet licensing standards is beyond their control, since there is no obligation on the part of the people with whom they work to accept or follow ECD's advice. There is no requirement for groups and individuals to have ECD's 'sign off' before they go to MOE for licensing approval (some groups do not go to ECD at all, or bypass ECD's advice), or for MOE to follow ECD's views on whether licensing is supported.

Currently, when a service first applies to be licensed, MOE is unable to require anything other than the regulated minimum standards. It is through the chartering process that MOE exercises guidance on quality issues. Bringing the processes of licensing and chartering closer together would help to resolve identified conflicts between minimum standards and quality standards.

- A fourth issue raised by the groups' and individuals' descriptions of the processes they have gone through is the high level of volunteer work and expertise that is required to establish a licensed and chartered centre. In no other sector of education, except perhaps in the establishment of kura kaupapa Maori, is so much expected of members of the community. This may be the first time parents have worked as volunteers in an education setting, so they may also have only limited experience about a whole range of other things, as well as community needs assessment.

In what ways could the volunteer workload be reduced? One reasonable measure would be to streamline processes and information and to make ECD responsible for assessing community need as part of its advice and support role.

- A fifth issue relates to planning. Proposals in the long term strategic plan are that MOE would play an increased role in identifying gaps in provision of early childhood services, and

control of their establishment and closure. If the proposals are adopted, where does this leave ECD in its role of helping groups and individuals with community needs assessment, since this is part of or closely related to planning? ECD already has established expertise in community needs assessment. MOE has established expertise and information through its planning role within the schools sector. How to bring those processes of community needs assessment and planning together requires consideration. The relationship between MOE and ECD is a recurring issue in this evaluation, and is also discussed in later sections.

- A sixth issue relates to viability. There is agreement among ECD and MOE and parents in centres that they want early childhood centres to be sustainable operations. In part this will relate to how well the community needs assessment is undertaken, and the degree of understanding of the financial and management commitment that is involved in running different types of licensed and chartered centre (e.g. sessional, all-day, mixed age). Perspectives of those who were establishing centres show that some think they do not need or want advice and support after becoming licensed. This raises an issue of whether there should be a greater level of certainty that the centre will remain viable before it is licensed. Ways in which ECD could support a business case or provide models are discussed on p.42.
- Finally, post-licensing support is not necessarily sought by all centres. In order to strengthen viability, post-licensing support could become a required part of the licensing and chartering process, provided either through ECD or through an early childhood umbrella organisation, such as a playcentre association or kindergarten association.

Perspectives on impacts

Most thought that the impact of ECD's advice and support was variable, and depended on the knowledge, skills, training and availability of individual staff members, an issue that is discussed in the section on staffing and resources.

MOE national staff

MOE national staff said they did not have 'hard data' about the impact of ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support, so their views were based on anecdotal evidence. MOE staff expect the impact to differ according to need, with the impact greatest where the need was greatest. They thought this would presuppose targeting in terms of level of support, a condition that is part of the current Document of Accountability. MOE staff thought that provision should match the level of expressed need to some degree.

They said there was some anecdotal evidence that some of the work to get a centre up to licensing standards was being undertaken at regional level by MOE management centre staff.

MOE management centre staff

Only two management centres were able to comment on the impacts of ECD's advice and support. The third had restructured and no longer had a person employed with sole responsibility for early childhood education. They said they could not comment because *hands-on* knowledge was lacking.

Staff from one management centre thought ECD advice on management was variable, but was improving. One staff member identified a *grey* area over whether ECD should give explicit advice about job descriptions, employment agreements and budgeting, or whether MOE should do this work. She thought that confusion over this has arisen because management requirements form part of the DOPs, and some ECD staff therefore expect MOE to work on it. While she regarded this as part of the whole picture of setting up a centre, and therefore ECD's role, she also acknowledged that it is hard to tell groups what they need to know when they are not ready to have that knowledge.

A second MOE management centre thought there were impacts of ECD's advice and support on management and environments. They referred to ECD's advice with policy and charter development, designing environments and general establishment issues. They thought 'quality comes third' because there are not the hours and funding to support quality. They also noted that *by the time the centre is up and running quality is out of ECD's control.*

ECD national staff

ECD national staff said the impact of ECD's work is that centres reach licensing status, access funds and therefore are able to provide early childhood education. Parents working through ECD process are informed, able to take responsibility for operation and able to use the policies that ECD assisted them to develop. ECD work results in good working conditions for centre staff that meet legal requirements. If centres then link up with ECD for professional development, there is an extra spin-off in the established relationship already in existence. Another impact is the development of skills and capacity, especially in people working through the licensing and chartering process in Pacific and Maori community-based centres. These are management skills and skills related to employment and community development and understandings about communities, community needs and children's needs.

ECD regional staff

ECD regional staff described the following impacts:

- some groups decide not to go ahead with establishing a licensed and chartered centre because they understand the implications;
- centres become licensed and chartered;
- centres are financially viable and able to be sustained;
- some aspects of the environment are better than they would have been;
- environments are well designed and meet the educational needs of infants, toddlers and children;
- centres are well resourced;
- some aspects of the framework are better and centres are viable;
- costly mistakes are avoided;
- centres feel better supported;
- feedback is positive and there is an ongoing relationship between ECD and the centre.

Centres that had become licensed and chartered with ECD support and advice

The six centres that had become licensed and chartered were all positive about the impact of ECD's advice and support. Positive effects were described in the following areas: environment, management systems, policies, employment of qualified staff, financial decisions and viability.

Centre A

A licensed and chartered centre for the children of teenage mothers was set in school grounds. The centre continued to use ECD for some areas of professional development after it had become licensed. The manager and staff said ECD had helped them establish a good environment, workable management structures with parent involvement in decision making, good policies, relevant professional development and a very strong start. There was recognition of the quality of the centre for children and those who worked in it.

The primary school principal says our children are well socialised, [have] skills in learning to read, have been through a transition process to go to primary school. If primary school says these children are learning ready then we have achieved. The children want to go. They are happy and busy. The quality of the environment is so pleasant it impacts on staff.

Centre B

A second centre for the children of teenage mothers said ECD co-ordinator's advice and support had made *all the difference*. Information and *emotional support* had been provided and they had set up a quality centre and made no significant mistakes financially or within the environment. They felt that the process had been done correctly from the beginning.

Centre C

A faith-based centre said ECD's advice had had a *great impact* and felt ECD could take credit for the centre's achievements. The manager said that ECD made them think about quality, which the centre had wanted. Respect for cultural issues was evident in ECD's way of working with this centre.

She was supportive about [faith-based] culture. She gave a feeling 'Yes, you need to keep it and we will help you to do that'. We wanted quality and she made us consider this. Maybe before I wouldn't have thought early childhood education training was so important.

This centre has recently been reviewed by ERO, which indicated its progress in developing a suitable management structure and its comprehensive charter policy framework. High standards of health, safety and hygiene were reported. Staff were well qualified. The ERO report said the centre had now the challenge of developing a curriculum incorporating the principles of Te Whāriki with the faith's teachings and practices. It also had a high percentage of new immigrant families, which placed considerable demands on it.

Centre D

A fourth described a *tremendous impact* on equipment, playground design and quality of the programme.

It is difficult to start from scratch without a mine of information. [The co-ordinator] could tell us where to go to look at and access equipment. She suggested a u shaped table instead of highchairs. She knew about the appropriate equipment. You can feed or talk to more than one baby at once with this.

Centre E

Two private owners who already had experience of centre ownership reported an impact largely on design and the environment. One also said that thanks to the work of ECD she *knew everything was in place correctly*. This owner had developed a heritage building that had been used as a school and a temporary early childhood centre. She said that ECD put in hours of work helping them decide on plans in relation to heritage building requirements. The other, who had re-located her centre and increased the roll size, said the impact of advice and support on the design and environment was *phenomenal*.

Groups/individuals working towards licensing and chartering

All four groups/individuals in the general stream commented on the positive impact of ECD advice and support. They made reference to advice on regulations and specifications, financial management, design, playgrounds, buildings, equipment, emotional support, programme and quality. Two people singled out the positive impact of continuity between the advice of MOE and ECD. One person was worried that restructuring in their MOE management centre could change this consistency. Some comments were:

Wouldn't have done so well without them. They are available and approachable. Because they are in centres all the time they really have the finger on the pulse. They see how things work and don't work.

They encourage people to set up quality. There is an emphasis on this. ... I learned there are different educational needs for different groups.

Someone to turn to. [The co-ordinator's] always there. You pick up the phone and know she is always ready to listen. She helped me persevere.

Summary of perspectives on impacts

There are differences between the perspectives of MOE national and MOE management centre staff on the impacts of ECD's advice and support work. These differences seem to depend on the interviewee's own actual contact with the field. MOE national staff have expectations that are reflected in the Document of Accountability for servicing according to need. The experiences of centres, groups and individuals seem to support that this indeed happens.

Management centre staff assessed impacts from different standpoints. One team focused on an area they think is poorly carried out, namely ECD's advice on employment of centre staff. If ECD does not carry out its role effectively or the centre fails to act on good advice, MOE is then asked to assist. The other took a different view on management advice, seeing the impact here as positive. Perhaps this is one of those areas where assessment of impacts depends on personal

experience of specific work, and indicates that the quality of ECD work is highly dependent on its staff, their knowledge, and their ongoing professional development.

ECD national and regional staff and centres/groups/individuals thought there were similar and similarly beneficial impacts. Perhaps the national ECD staff saw these impacts in a somewhat ‘rosier’, more idealistic format than those at the centre of the work.

Factors associated with effectiveness

All participants identified ECD staff as a factor associated with effectiveness. ECD staff also identified resources as key contributors to the effectiveness of their work. Staffing and resources are discussed in the next section.

MOE national staff

MOE national staff identified three factors that they think are associated with effectiveness:

- communication and understanding between MOE and ECD;
- ECD’s contractual relationship with MOE;
- ECD’s physical location close to the people it works with.

According to MOE, a key factor is whether there is sufficient regular exchange of ideas and information or close sharing of goals and understanding between MOE and ECD. MOE national staff thought that at a regional level, ECD’s previous national structure seemed to inhibit local communication between MOE and ECD, because a great deal of ECD communication seemed to go back to their national office. They thought the recent appointment of regional managers within ECD was likely to substantively change that dynamic.

Another factor identified by MOE national staff is ECD’s contractual arrangement with MOE. They thought that this may constrain ECD’s ability to be differentially responsive to different groups, to the extent that it is inflexible or specifies outputs. However, they thought this issue had been addressed in the last Document of Accountability negotiation.

The physical location of ECD staff close to the centres they are trying to advise and support was also seen as helpful.

Therefore they should be able to have some sort of degree of relationship between the centre and the local office in a way that MOE may find more difficult.

MOE regional staff

Like the national MOE staff, staff in two MOE management centres talked about the importance of the relationship between MOE and ECD. In one region, MOE staff said they tried to make clear what their expectations and processes are, and to provide a regular forum for linking relevant organisations. This MOE office said it set up protocols on specific issues. It acknowledged the problems caused by different interpretations of regulations, and was trying to establish the same consistent interpretation to go on MOE website.

While ECD and MOE need to work together, two of the three MOE regional offices thought there needed to be some separation between them. It is an interesting comparison that the same views are not held about ECD's work with licence-exempt playgroups, where ECD is both the funder and the auditor.

Staff at one management centre thought the function of assessing standards requires some measure of objectivity.

I think like a lot of agencies that we have relationships with, it's useful having the split because the functions are distinctly different and if they become part of the whole family, then I think we lose some of the objectivity. I mean it's the same argument over ERO and schools.... This way ECD is providing the lead up information and advice and guidance to licensing and chartering, but our agency is the one who is exercising the legal right to license and charter. Now if you bring them together then there's real potential for a confusion of roles there, isn't there? Well here it's pretty clear cut. The organisations get assisted to reach standard, another agency checks whether that standard is in fact being met. ...So I think that there's a use in having a split. I think there's some risks of having ECD type stuff and Ministry type stuff altogether with the same family.

In another management centre, staff said they thought there should be a strong *legal/ethical split* between the regulatory function and the development/advice function. They were critical of past practice where they thought that MOE staff had had a *very strong and close* working relationship with ECD staff, to the extent that MOE could be seen as licensing centres on the basis of its own advice. However, in their next breath, they said they thought there needed to be a 'partnership' between ECD and MOE staff to develop better centres and services. What this may mean in practice is unclear.

Other factors that MOE management centre staff thought may hinder effectiveness, raised by one management centre in each case, were:

Capabilities of individuals and groups establishing the centre

- the motivation of people trying to set up the centre could be a hindrance if they 'had their own agenda' or thought they could do it better than ECD;
- the variance in abilities of the people with whom ECD works;
- the limited ability of groups and individuals to *do the market research* and identify whether centres are sustainable in terms of the local community, families and staff. The management centre staff who raised this issue referred to a review on which ECD had worked with them, showing that more affluent areas had more services and a greater diversity of services. They couldn't *see evidence of anyone in the sector thinking outside the square of its own centre* and thought a role for government in planning is essential. One option they floated was to look for a public/private partnership where services leased a facility, so that there were different options in the same location.

Funding and staffing of ECD services

- the hours MOE funds for ECD to assist centres in licensing and chartering. These were perceived to be inadequate, especially with people who have not established a centre before;
- the view that the number of ECD co-ordinators does not necessarily match the number of centres, so workloads vary.

Funding of early childhood centres

- lack of *risk capital* or *venture capital* to provide money up front for centres coming into licensing, or insufficient funding for establishment. It was not clear whether this money was expected to be repaid.

Requirements and knowledge of outside organisations

- different regulations from different organisations which are not consistent with the early childhood regulations;
- poor understanding from outside organisations, such as a city council, of the options and regulatory requirements for early childhood centres.

Perceptions of ECD

- perceptions of some people wanting to establish a centre that ECD is the *lowest common denominator* and its advice and support is not useful.

Contestability

- *No strong views on whether ECD should be the only provider of advice and support to licensing and chartering. [I] don't see[contestability] as a bad thing.*

An important issue in the underlying purpose of the licensing and chartering was whether licensing new centres is in fact creating new spaces. The situation in one area was that many centres were not full, yet new centres were being established.

Early childhood education is viewed as lucrative by some, easy money with access to government funding and subsidies.

National ECD staff

ECD national staff thought crucial factors in helping ECD to be successful were:

- the qualities of ECD staff;
- the community development approach, based on the principles of building on strengths, rather than a deficit model;
- ECD's strong commitment to quality education for children and their parents. *There's a real push to go beyond the minimum standards. ..The commitment, the vision for the needs of children...really drives people... This commitment from ECD staff makes a difference in terms of helping our success;*
- the small size of ECD as an organisation, so that people know each other.

What are the factors that hinder ECD's effectiveness? ECD national staff pinpointed the following:

- contestability of service provision:

[A hindrance is] contestable contracts that don't seem to support the concept of a government agency being the place to deliver services. And as an example there was a Pacific contract put out for Pacific community groups to [provide] support to licensing and chartering. We would have been happier to support the initiation of greater community involvement in delivery in terms of 'Ok, how can we work collaboratively with other groups?' But it was seen as a contestable contract between ECD and community providers and I just don't think it was a good move.

- inability to specialise as much as they would prefer. Because of the small size of the organisation and costs, responsibilities for the full and varied range of ECD's work sometimes have to be part of a single staff member's work. This makes it hard for staff to develop expertise in this complex work area.
- how decisions about the contract between ECD and MOE are made. For example, ECD national staff questioned the basis for determining ECD funding. They thought the contract continues to place a constraint on flexibility because it defines targets which are based on previous years, and funds these accordingly. *So we then cut our suit according to our cloth.* An issue explored later in this section is whose policy advice determines decisions about contracting, the basis of ECD contract, and why contestable contracts for advice and support are being let.
- limited understanding on the part of MOE about the time involved in tasks. They gave as an example the time it takes to coach people to contact their city council, fill in forms, or help them resolve problems.

ECD regional staff

Regional staff made particular comment about factors that *hindered* their effectiveness. They also sometimes had their own proposals about shaping policy, and conveyed a sense of frustration that they were not in a strong position to influence this. Their local networks and relationship with MOE management centre were important factors.

Policy issues raised by regional staff were:

- the limited criteria and narrow basis for decision-making related to the discretionary grants scheme;
- inadequacy of the discretionary grants pool, including funding for health and safety;
- inadequacy of bulk funding for community centres;
- low standards set in regulation;
- sustainability of centres which became licensed and chartered;
- a high volunteer workload in becoming licensed and chartered;

- inflexibility of the Document of Accountability;
- funding for resource development.

Groups appeared to be encouraged into licensing when they should not be, by:

- MOE policy of increased participation;
- a mistaken view that bulk funding would be adequate to cover ongoing costs – this applies particularly to community centres;
- no requirements for proof of sustainability;
- no requirements for evidence of annual plans or budgeting.

An issue of real concern to all three regional teams was that some community groups are establishing licensed, chartered early childhood services that are beyond their communities' means on an ongoing basis.

There is a push to get licence-exempt centres licensed but you need the support networks for them for that to be viable. Lots want to be full day care but to make that viable they are always struggling for money. There is often not enough money to maintain buildings and equipment up to standard and so they can lose their licence.

Last year in [region] there was no money for health and safety. I had two centres closed because they didn't comply. The run-down centres lose staff to the flash ones.

All ECD regional staff had a strong view that not all centres should be licensed.

ECD staff in two regional offices noted that management groups in many community centres appeared to be struggling. They thought this may be because of the turnover of parents and whanau, a lack of people willing to volunteer, a lack of people with adequate skills for the employment and financial management, and a lack of funding to pay for basic administration work.

The change from being a voluntary group to running a small size business and being an employer: it's a massive change.

The funding for ECD service provision was regarded as an issue by one regional office, where staff saw a tension between having to give advice to all who enquire, and meeting targets. If ECD meets its targets, they said there was no ability for it to get more funding for their services.

Local factors raised by ECD regional staff were:

- their relationship with MOE management centre;
- inconsistent interpretation of the regulations by MOE staff;
- licensing standards of MOE management centre;
- the lack of availability of building sites.

Inconsistent interpretations of ECE Regulations

All ECD staff had had experience of different interpretations of the early childhood regulations by MOE liaison officers.

This makes it difficult for ECD co-ordinators to clarify the bottom line and offer consistent advice to establishing groups. We often feel we need to gauge our own individual liaison officer's interpretation of a regulation.

One co-ordinator gave an example of an MOE liaison officer *turning a blind eye* to non-compliance for a centre that could not afford to give the staff their statutory lunch break entitlement. She felt this was wrong and created problematic precedents. In an internal discussion paper she gave the examples of country-wide inconsistencies in the following areas:

- whether sleep rooms can be open to play areas;
- whether toilets have to be directly accessible to children;
- the interpretation of Regulation 37 that mixed age groups should not be licensed for group sizes of more than 25 unless the Secretary is satisfied that the centre is, or will be, so organised that all children will be *adequately cared for*;
- child:staff ratios for excursions;
- outdoor environment requirements;
- suitability of types of dishwasher.

In her view, quality was hindered by the low standards required by the regulations, and by precedent or *what is happening down the road*. A co-ordinator in another ECD office agreed. She said there were some instances where inconsistent interpretation of regulations had led to groups carrying out costly work that then needed to be changed.

Discretionary grants scheme

The discretionary grants scheme was described in Chapter 1. It is of central importance to community based groups, because it often provides the funding that enables them to establish their centre, albeit after considerable fundraising themselves. ECD regional staff were critical of the scheme because of its capped funding pool. This meant that even groups that met the criteria for establishment, and had raised the required percentage of costs, might still miss out. An example of this is described in one of our parent interviews. They were also critical that the scheme is not related in any way to the kind of early childhood education provision that is desirable.

In a written statement, one co-ordinator made proposals for reshaping the discretionary grant application and decision-making process. She gave the following reasons for this:

- The current process does not allow assessment of the quality of building plans in relation to the building's potential to offer an adequate learning environment. The discretionary grant application form does not ask for information on the relationship between group size and quality. An example is a group that had developed plans which were approved for

discretionary grant. Yet the group had yet to decide on specific layout in terms of spaces for infants.

- The current functioning of an existing centre's management group is not taken into account when assessing the merits of applications. An example was work undertaken with an existing management group which already had serious non-compliance problems with another established centre highlighted by ERO. Many of ECD co-ordinator's suggestions were not put into practice and the building now has significant design faults. One telling comment: *If groups make poor decisions, I cannot force change.*
- Groups may establish a licensed and chartered centre using a discretionary grant and then find they are unable to function because of budget issues. Groups are not always fully aware of the ongoing costs of running a full day service in particular, or the implications of becoming employers, ensuring professional development, planning and staff meetings. This issue could be monitored by requiring groups to plan their budgets prior to the discretionary grants process and to submit their budget forecasts as part of that process. *I feel that such a requirement would support groups to establish services which are in a strong position to provide and continue to develop sustainable quality provision of early childhood care and education.*

Licensed and chartered centres' views on how to improve ECD advice and support

The centres were asked if they had suggestions on how ECD could improve its advice and support. They also described other things (if any) they thought ECD could be doing, and what the hardest things about getting licensed and chartered were.

Representatives said that the following things were the hardest:

1. Quality and availability:

- the need for more ECD staff, so that they are available for professional development and for more work on licensing and chartering;
- concern about the lack of early childhood specialised staff within the local MOE management centre since the office was restructured;
- conflicting advice from different officials from different government agencies on meeting regulations.

2. Lack of funding, particularly for:

- establishment costs;
- employment of a qualified teacher to help with establishment of centre;
- the amount of work involved in becoming licensed and chartered.

3. *Their own difficulty in:*

- ability to fundraise;
- waiting for resource consent. *It took 6 months from when we purchased the land till the consent came through.*

One person suggested that further resources should be available for newly established centres, e.g. on staff appraisal, planning and budgeting. Another said she would have *liked to have a better and more clear idea about what is really needed. I was puzzled about the rules and regulations. At times I wanted to stop, but I had belief and faith.*

Two examples of the issues facing centres which seek to become licensed and chartered are given below.

Centre A

This centre, built on school grounds, said it had trouble in getting approvals from MOE because the centre didn't *fit in a box*. The representative found raising \$95,000 for its establishment to be very difficult, and said she was *lucky* to get a large donation from a businessman. At the beginning it was hard on the person responsible for the establishment because she did not have an early childhood qualification herself.

It would have been wonderful if I'd had the head teacher for support. At times I felt so isolated. I didn't know who to ask for help.

One of the teachers at this centre would have liked to use ECD for their professional development because they appreciated ECD's work, but ECD was booked up. She thought that ECD should be better funded so they were available to all.

A final comment: *Thank you. ECD is really professional, supportive, adaptable. I've had a long association with some. They are hard working and I've a good relationship with them. Their job is unique and if ECD didn't do it I wouldn't be here.*

Centre B

This centre identified conflicting advice between ERO, MOE and ECD as a difficulty for them. They would have liked written advice that was co-ordinated and consistent, e.g. one big folder with all the relevant requirements and legislation within it. They felt they *worked blind* a lot. They said they wanted to have legislation at their finger-tips and read it for themselves.

The hardest things they found about becoming licensed were the hard and time-consuming work, the many tasks that needed to be undertaken, and lack of resources.

We were doing too many jobs at once. I was completely stretched time-wise. And we had to find all the money for resources before we had any bulk funding.

They would have liked to employ a trained teacher sooner than they did, but could not afford it because *we set up on a shoe-string. We didn't have any money. We had volunteers for ages.*

They recommended further resources for *staff appraisal systems and future things you still have to do*. They would have liked to have more help with setting up budgets, and help to develop a one year plan.

Maybe we should have a one year plan. Doing budgets on percentages. Having help in setting up budgets.

Their final comment: *It's wonderful that they're there. ECD is really supportive.*

Groups' and individuals' views on how to improve ECD licensing and chartering advice and support

Several issues were raised by the two individuals and one group that was in the process of establishing a centre. They were at different stages in the process – some at an early stage. These issues were:

- the need for more information about what lay ahead for them and to have a realistic appraisal of tasks. One person suggested a timeline with tasks to be done and the development of different models of building and organisation design to consider. *Templated designs would have been good and add and delete rather than, 'Christ, where do I start?'*
- difficulty in meeting the regulations with little money.
- negotiating the deed of covenant with a school. A group planning to build on school grounds found this was time-consuming, and the process was relitigated when a new board was elected.

Some final comments:

They've really made us believe in ourselves, given us confidence. Incredible support. I can't sing their praises enough.

They've been great. And it's free advice to the setting up organisation. That's their job.

There'll be things I think I know and I don't.

Issues for recipients of ECD advice and support

The issues that are raised by representatives of early childhood education centres receiving advice and support fall into three categories.

First, are issues to do with government policies about bulk funding and discretionary grants and regulations. These echo some of the predominant issues described by regional ECD staff. They lend further weight to the suggestion that establishment grants should be available for start up costs, such as employing a qualified teacher early in the establishment, and buying equipment. This relates to when in the process centres become licensed, and the requirements for this. The

inadequacy of the levels of bulk funding also make it hard to develop and maintain a quality service.

Second, is the operation of government agencies. The views of some representatives were similar to the views of some MOE and ECD staff, i.e. that levels of staffing within ECD could be improved. This also raised the question of why ECD staff were not available, and links to concerns voiced by ECD staff about the impact of contestability. Two centres were not able to use ECD for professional development, although they wanted to do this, because of an already established relationship, which makes good sense. Some representatives wanted more information and resources from ECD. Other issues were raised about the preference for an early childhood specialist within MOE management centre (people are supported best by those who know their issues) and the importance of consistency in interpretation of regulations.

Finally, the workload for volunteers came through most descriptions as one that is high and demanding for parents of young children.

Issues arising from perspectives on factors associated with effectiveness

Everyone in MOE and ECD thought that relationships between MOE and ECD could help or hinder ECD's effectiveness. There was general agreement on the need for regional staff to have regular contact, share information, and have common frameworks of understanding about roles and responsibilities and common interpretations of standards for early childhood services. In reality, this does not seem to happen consistently. Consequently, the people who are working hard to establish centres may end up making expensive and time consuming mistakes or being frustrated by inconsistent advice. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction at the absence of any standard interpretation of the early childhood regulations. This has also been aired by participants in the consultation over the long term strategic plan.

Some components of the regulations are clear and need to be strictly adhered to, while others are open to interpretation. It would help ECD and MOE to reach shared understandings if they talked together about inconsistent interpretations for particular centres.

One MOE management centre told of the efforts it is making to establish forums for exchanging ideas and information. Its success is untested, but it is essential that good communication happens at a regional level. In this respect, the following changes which are already occurring may be helpful: ECD's restructuring to provide regional managers, so there is more local responsiveness; and MOE's work to develop a 'desk file' with interpretations of regulations. ECD has recently also conducted regional strategy meetings with a focus on training about government goals, the collaborative nature of the relationship between ECD and MOE, changes to the Document of Accountability, and other issues. Meetings between regional ECD and MOE staff were held recently in Auckland, Hamilton and Christchurch and are scheduled for the next quarter in other areas. The aims of these meetings are to clarify respective roles, exchange information and perspectives, and discuss what information ECD can provide for MOE planning of early childhood education (ECD, 2001b, p.8).

Good communication is also apparently necessary at national levels, especially in relation to the development of policy relevant to the areas of ECD work that MOE does not know about. ECD is in a good position to know about problems with the discretionary grants scheme, for example, because it works extensively to help people make applications for this scheme.

These issues about communication between MOE and ECD raise questions:

- What systems would enable effective communication at regional levels? Who is responsible for setting in place good systems?
- Should ECD and MOE continue as separate organisations? Two MOE management centres supported the ‘split’ between the two organisations, on the grounds that objectivity is needed to check if standards are reached. Could not this position be sustained within an organisation that separates out its operational and audit functions? There are arguments that integrating the two organisations could provide greater coherence and consistency and ensure that policy makers are not divorced from the consequences of their policy decisions.

Another area on which ECD national staff and ECD regional staff are agreed is that there are problems with the contractual arrangements between MOE and ECD. MOE national staff also questioned whether a focus on outputs constrains ECD’s responsiveness, and one MOE management centre thought that ECD funding is insufficient for its staffing requirements.

From an ECD perspective, the Document of Accountability is a constraint to working as effectively as possible with groups and individuals, because it does not allow for any extra demands. The tradition of setting targets and funding on the basis of previous years does not allow ECD to attract additional funding if it is asked to work with more groups than specified in the contract. On the other hand, it will not meet its targets if it does not get a certain number of groups to licensing. This in itself may not be in the best interests of early childhood education provision, if licensing and chartering more centres undermines the viability of existing centres.

ECD’s new way of working, by categorising each group according to their needs (high, medium and low), may help to make more effective use of staff time and to monitor the work of staff. But this does not answer the questions of whether funding is set at the right level, and whether the targets are reasonable.

Should ECD work with any group that wants to establish a centre? In its Document of Accountability, ECD is required to *provide licence and chartering information and advice on demand*. The issue raised by one MOE management centre is relevant here: an oversupply (or under-supply) of centres can be created if there is no appropriate planning. Whose needs are being met by establishing a new centre? With good planning in place, ECD’s role could be to work only with those groups where there is an established need for new centres. This discussion raises questions in relation to a more co-ordinated approach to establishing the need for new centres, and the inclusion of assessment of unmet need in the Document of Accountability, and in the process of setting targets.

An associated issue is the emergence of contestable contracts for licensing and chartering advice and support. Only ECD staff highlighted contestability as a barrier to their work. Evidence in

this evaluation report is that licensing and chartering advice and support requires a depth of expertise, understanding and skill level that does not appear overnight and that needs sustenance.

There are arguments for a single government agency to be responsible for this work, including:

- the employment of a critical mass of staff and therefore an ability to specialise (where this is not possible, ECD signalled that there are problems);
- the ability to develop resources and training programmes to support staff work;
- coverage throughout the country and a close connection with the government, which has an interest in seeing that centres are established where they are needed and are of high quality.

Removing contestability is a structural solution to the need to foster expertise in licensing and chartering advice and support, because it could enable concentration of such expertise and supporting resources. Other solutions that could be considered include:

- use of itinerant staff;
- collaboration with other providers;
- multi-skilling of ECD staff.

ECD regional staff raised a number of issues about the broader policy framework in which the sector operates and the impact on their work to try to help develop centres that are sustainable and of high quality. They highlighted three areas:

- the funding amounts and operation of the discretionary grant scheme;
- the levels of bulk funding for early childhood centres;
- regulatory requirements and their interpretation.

One MOE management centre supported ECD's view that levels of bulk funding are inadequate. MOE regional staff also supported the need for consistency in interpretation of regulations.

These perspectives point to the need to see the work of ECD within a wider policy context. ECD cannot be expected to be solely responsible for encouraging high quality, viable centres when other parts of government policy are operating under a different, lower set of standards. The proposals of the long term strategic plan working group relating to these issues are:

- to improve standards (including ratios, group size and teacher qualification requirements) set in regulation over time;
- to develop a new funding formula which is responsive to cost factors;
- to require business plans as part of the discretionary grants scheme.

If adopted, these would help to address some of the issues raised.

However, more could be done by MOE to tighten up their requirements for proof of quality through their involvement in the licensing process. This could occur at the point of discretionary grant application, by requiring that building and organisational plans are submitted as part of that

process, and assessed according to quality standards of centre design. This would require policy development on the features of a quality design that meet the needs of infants, toddlers and young children within different organisational arrangements.

It would be helpful for ECD to be a key player in any such policy work. This suggested approach, where MOE and ECD discuss how their policies and operations interact, could be applied to other areas of work as a way of forging a stronger and fruitful relationship. Responsibility for this approach does not rest solely with one party: it requires both MOE and ECD to take initiatives.

There are signs that following the Hunn and Cullen (2000) report, moves have already been made by MOE and ECD to work together more closely.

Issues related to resource development are relevant to this topic and are considered next.

Perspectives on ECD staffing and resources

Perspectives on ECD staffing and resources came through many of the areas of discussion by our interviewees. Staffing and resources are highlighted in this section as a factor that is critical to success.

Staffing

MOE national staff

MOE national staff regarded ECD staffing as critical, and identified qualities in staff that support their work to be successful. These are:

- having a base of early childhood knowledge;
- having experience of working in a licensed and chartered service in a position of responsibility;
- having an early childhood qualification;
- cultural diversity of ECD staff.

They thought that these qualities promote a credible base of skills and understandings. Professional development and skills need to be up to date. ECD's ability to recruit people with the right skill set is therefore an important question.

One ECD co-ordinator who was portrayed as making ECD office successful was described like this:

... the sorts of things that I identify that make that office successful is the person that does licensing and chartering, has a paint stripper brain on her, with very broad base background. She's got sort of soft skills that enable her to really work collaboratively with groups. I know that she doesn't do two visits to each service, I know that she probably does more like 22 visits to each service. That sort of passion and belief in early childhood makes her a very successful

operator ... It's really important to acknowledge the person I relate to has... got that whole skill and commitment, and connectedness in terms of unity that she demonstrates. Invaluable but they don't exist in every region.

MOE national staff thought the impact of ECD's work was variable and dependent on the level of expertise of groups/individuals themselves and the skills of staff. They said some ECD staff work collaboratively with MOE and others do not.

MOE management centre staff

Like the national staff, MOE regional staff also emphasised the importance of skilled and qualified ECD staff. Attributes emphasised by MOE regional staff as being important are:

- ECD staff know and understand what they are doing and what contributes to quality;
- ECD staff work collaboratively;
- there is good liaison with MOE and outside organisations.

Staff in one management centre questioned whether there are any checks on whether visits reported by co-ordinators did in fact occur. In contrast, staff in another MOE management centre commented on the commitment of ECD staff to working long hours.

Staff in one management centre commented on the variability of ECD staff. They knew of some people who preferred to work independently because they thought that the advice and support they would receive from the designated co-ordinator would not be effective. In this management centre, one MOE staff member thought that some private owners could have more knowledge than ECD co-ordinator. She had also heard comment from a private owner that they did not want ECD advice because they thought every 'ECD centre' would look alike.

They thought there was variability of advice and support evident in all areas of ECD's work, for example:

- On quality and the curriculum – *Some of it's been really good, some of it's been abysmal;*
- On the environment – *If the group's coming from a playgroup, it's that mentality, then the building is designed on a playgroup mentality.*

ECD national staff

ECD national staff identified ECD staff and staff conditions as factors in ECD's success. They highlighted:

- staff using expertise and sharing best practice;
- staff having agreed understanding of standards;
- staff having development opportunities as important conditions;
- cultural diversity of ECD staff, which enabled Pacific groups to access early childhood people from their own ethnic or the wider Pacific background.

ECD national staff said they try to recruit staff and provide support and ongoing information so the staff can deliver advice and support in a culturally appropriate way. They use both external and internal resources to provide centres with information and knowledge. There is a computer system to monitor records or reports of work against targets. Staff record their own data (e.g., number of visits and nature of work) and the computer programme will generate useful reports about the centre/group and action taken by staff. Summary reports are able to be produced by staff member, region or group/centre. Individual staff performance is managed through mutually agreed performance objectives and identification of achievement objectives and professional support. However, *the bare practical reality of that might not be as good as we think.*

ECD national staff said they had many extremely qualified and skilled staff, but there were some staff whose skills and understanding were not as good as desired and who were not supported as well as they could be. *So they're achieving but not necessarily at a high level. They are not at the 'edge of best practice'.* They thought this may arise in part from ECD's past practice of recruiting people who had understanding of their communities, but did not necessarily have knowledge of early childhood education or a tertiary qualification. They thought problems of recruiting staff with the necessary skills and qualifications was made more difficult by the dispersion of early childhood centres throughout New Zealand. In some areas licensing and chartering occurs only occasionally and staff are assigned this work as part of the wide range of their work. For example, a staff member may be allocated only 0.1 of a full time equivalent to do the licensing and chartering work. There is also a limited number of centres that the government is funding, so that there is a limit to the amount of licence and chartering support that can be undertaken. According to ECD national staff this means that regional staff are not able to specialise to the necessary degree for work that requires sophisticated understanding and expertise, or to get specialist training.

Measures are occurring to sort out some of these problems. One option is to pair experienced and skilled staff with less experienced staff. This has been tried in one regional office, by pairing a new Pacific staff member and an experienced staff member, with reportedly good results.

The national office staff believe the restructuring of ECD and the appointment of regional managers will enable closer links and better support and supervision for staff delivering the service. Previously, they say, there was little direct monitoring of people's work. *We are aware of things that have come to light that we couldn't have been aware of with one person traipsing round the country.* They hope that the new reporting system can be extended to pick up information on work processes and barriers.

Two working groups were formed in August 2001: a licensing and chartering working group and a licence-exempt playgroup working group. Each working group will:

- *complete a strategy for 12 months based on identified barriers to quality delivery and solutions. The strategies will include benchmarking best practice for each output, identifying and addressing staff capacity issues, and developing communication strategies to inform ECD stakeholders of services and changes to them. To inform these strategies, ECD will actively use the research report, funded by the Ministry of Education, on ECD's licence-exempt and licensed/chartered services [i.e. this report].*

- *continue to refine newly developed databases to support improved supervision and self-reflection for ECD, and strengthen policy advice that ECD can provide to the Ministry of Education. ECD will report for the second quarter on a range of extra information it believes will be useful for policy advice and planning. This will include curriculum input, the nature of parent support information provided for licence-exempt groups, and proximity of ECD services to low decile schools.* (Early Childhood Development, 2001b)

ECD regional staff

ECD regional staff also pinpointed staffing, multi-cultural staff and community development focus as attributes that help ECD to be successful. While the multi-cultural facet of the organisation was thought to contribute to its success, some described dilemmas about Pacific co-ordinators being asked to do many different jobs. Staff in two regional offices thought that certain people should be designated for particular work so that it was clear who was responsible and staff were able to specialise. One co-ordinator emphasised that knowledge of regulations, design, management, employment, business and early childhood education is essential and *because someone worked in a centre [this] doesn't equip them to work in licensing and chartering*. Staff development and maintenance of knowledge were seen as important factors.

Parents

Most centres, groups and individuals were glowing in their praise of ECD staff, mentioning their willingness to be available at any time including weekends and evenings, their knowledge of the educational interests of babies, toddlers and young children, and the relationship of these interests to centre operation and design, their expert understanding of environments, and their concern with quality.

One centre manager thought that getting the right ECD person was important. She had experienced *very poor* advice from one co-ordinator and good advice from another.

Resources

ECD staff

Only ECD staff and some representatives of centres and groups (see previous section) commented about ECD resources.

Some national ECD resources are available for work on licensing and chartering. These include:

- *Establishing an early childhood centre* (Early Childhood Development, 2001). This booklet describes criteria for a licensed early childhood centre, the respective roles of ECD and the Ministry of Education, twelve steps to gaining a licence (setting out all the major issues that need to be addressed), a timeframe in which to do specific tasks prior to licensing, the role of government and other agencies in establishing centres, and critical questions to ask before establishing a centre.
- *Basic equipment list for licensed and chartered centres* (Early Childhood Development, 1998). This booklet relates equipment and facilities to the principles and goals of Te Whāriki, and provides a list of equipment and an estimate of quantity in relation to different

numbers of children. It emphasises that when selecting equipment for a mixed age centre, the three developmental levels, infants, toddlers and young children, need to be considered. It suggests centres should have a range of parenting books, activity idea books, health information, a Maori dictionary and a notice board.

As well, use is made of ECD resources for playgroups and of resources from other organisations, e.g. Inland Revenue Department, Learning Media, equipment and furniture suppliers, MOE publications. Each region has developed some regional resources, with local and procedural information, and these vary within the three offices.

ECD national staff said manuals and resources are provided, but need updating. A process for that to happen is in train, through a working group of staff who are involved in licensing and chartering work. The intranet is being developed so that people can look up pertinent Acts and have access to resources through it.

ECD regional staff gave great emphasis to their view that ECD resources and time are key factors in their ability to work effectively. While resources were seen to be positive factors in ECD's work, staff in two regional offices thought these were very limited in their focus and needed to be expanded. Staff in one regional office identified the need for a clear process about how ECD works with groups wanting to become licensed and chartered. This is a current gap that they thought could be filled through resource development and training.

Another co-ordinator pointed out that the current resources focus on minimum standards and not on quality. She thinks staffing schedules, plans and quality issues are interrelated. She believes that time should be spent at an early stage on these issues, and if this was done well it would save time further down the track. She made suggestions for the development of the following resources:

- Example plans, to support discussion on issues such as grouping children by developmental stage, transition issues, types of activity areas over different developmental stages, options for staff areas, kitchens, toilets. In terms of group size and space, models should reflect quality. *I'm thinking we could do a couple of options. One that's regulations and one that's better quality, depending on what the research says. So we actually go the full distance. You have your dreams. So they can see that as a continuum.*
- Staffing schedules, to support discussion about how staffing needs to work in relation to numbers of trained staff, dealing with lunch breaks, planning meetings, non-contact time, and the cost of providing these different models. There would be a focus on quality, cost and viability. *People can have these packages and take them away and do some more serious work themselves.*
- Budgets, to give a ball-park figure for each model, so that groups understand the relationship between the model and the different costs associated with each. *This is especially important for some of those Pacific Islands groups where the skills are not necessarily there and we need to be a lot more proactive and helping.*

- Buildings, indoor and outdoor areas and equipment resources, including photo books showing specific areas, facilities and equipment, and articles, as well as a and guide on how to apply for a discretionary grant.
- Management resource, including management task list, structures, responsibilities and roles, policy, finance and administration and staffing.

This co-ordinator said that the ongoing sustainability of the service is related to the kind of model chosen. If the model chosen is an expensive one, and parents are not prepared to pay, the centre will not be viable on an ongoing basis.

So when we get groups to do this, sometimes they don't want to know. They know the answer's not going to be great. They don't really want to go there. They just want that building through the discretionary grant. We'll worry about that later.

Issues arising from perspectives of ECD's staffing and resources

ECD staffing is critical to the success of ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support. It was interesting that the main focus of discussion on staffing centred on ECD's regional office staff, who are the 'face' of ECD.

ECD national and regional staff were in agreement that cultural diversity of staffing and a community development focus are attributes of ECD staff. They agreed with MOE that experience and qualifications in early childhood education are essential, but are not the only criteria for equipping staff to provide licensing and chartering advice and support. ECD regional staff demonstrated the level of specialist knowledge which is needed to work in this area, and were critical of the lack of specialist positions in some parts of New Zealand. ECD national staff agreed that it is desirable to have specialists, but thought they were prevented from doing so because there is insufficient licensing and chartering work in some areas. However, it may be worth investigating the possibility of employing some itinerant co-ordinators working from a regional base, so that there would always be a specialist doing this work. In addition, the practice of pairing experienced staff with inexperienced staff makes good sense. It may be worth considering how this practice could be extended so that all staff are well-supported.

MOE national staff, MOE regional staff and ECD national staff thought that the skills and understanding of ECD regional staff were variable. As a consequence they thought the impact of their work was variable. Parents in this sample were generally full of praise for ECD staff who are working with them currently, although there was criticism of another co-ordinator by one centre manager. MOE staff also thought that ECD staff needed to establish good relationships with MOE and others in their area.

While both ECD national and regional staff thought professional development opportunities are important, some ECD regional staff were critical that the professional development was not targeted to meeting the individual needs of *all* staff.

Only ECD staff talked about ECD resources. While national office staff acknowledged that manuals and resources need *updating*, ECD regional staff argued for more *extensive* resources

that are related to establishing quality services, not just minimum standards. The resources were regarded by the co-ordinators as essential tools of work that could make a crucial difference to ECD's efficiency and effectiveness. Parents also made suggestions for further resources to help them know what lies ahead. It would seem useful for real consideration to be given to the thoughtful, specific proposals made by one co-ordinator for sample plans, sample staffing schedules, sample centre budgets related to operational models, environment resources and a centre management resource.

Perspectives on licensing and chartering advice and support – Pacific stream

This study also included a focus on Pacific early childhood centres. The sample included centres recently licensed and chartered, and their perspectives are included. Most of the perspectives and issues raised above in the section on ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support for general groups also applied to the Pacific groups. However, some issues specific to these groups emerged.

MOE national staff

MOE national staff made only brief comments about the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Groups (PIECGs) and centres in relation to ECD support and advice. Mention was made of the strengths and skills of the Pacific co-ordinators. It seems important and appropriate that these are used to service the Pacific groups and families. But they cautioned that ethnicity should not be the only criterion used in appointment. They commented on the difficulty of combining in one person both cultural expertise and the technical knowledge required to assist centres in becoming licensed and chartered. These views raised the issue of capacity-building, once any *capacity lack* amongst ECD staff was identified.

MOE staff also referred to the difficulties involved in promoting participation in early childhood education for Pacific groupings. Comment was made on how Pacific peoples will take into account each Pacific co-ordinator's background and standing/status before choosing who they will work with, and who they will ignore.

MOE management centre staff

MOE regional staff spoke more specifically about local issues and relationships, and the need to allow for cultural values and needs. Many groups and centres were associated with churches, and the relationship between the licensee and the minister of the church can be very close. In some cases the church minister him/herself has problems in implementing curriculum, and money can end up going to the church as a whole, rather than to the Pacific early childhood group. There is some tension about finding the balance in meeting both early childhood education needs and cultural values. One comment was that *some Pacific groups want the funds but they don't always want to comply*.

In one region when there are joint ECD and MOE meetings about three times a year, the Pacific group meets separately. Mention was made that in this region 60 new centres had been opened, but this had not resulted in full enrolment in them by Pacific children and their families.

Management experience with some aspects of operation, such as budgeting and staffing, was an important area of support required by the centres. In terms of planning buildings and spaces that meet minimum requirements, it was thought that some PIECGs start off in a *church hall-type space*, and end up with something similar when they plan and build for licensing and chartering purposes. Such facilities have limited flexibility in use, yet they become licensed. It was thought that ECD should give more support to ensure that Pacific centres see other, good quality, Pacific licensed and chartered centre plans and buildings.

A major concern identified in one region was the fact that in one Pacific centre, when MOE came for the licensing visit, there were still 17 identified non-compliance areas, although ECD had said they were *ready*. So the calibre of advice by ECD is crucial, they report.

Another comment centred around the *readiness* aspect – centres being able to take on the role of management, and in particular being *good* employers. They questioned whether becoming licensed was always in Pacific groups' best interests. Another approach could be to become licensed, but to take longer to become chartered, and in the meantime receive additional help, advice, and funding.

A further identified issue was that many Pacific parents did not understand that, once the centre was licensed, they would have to pay fees, since government funding would not cover the total running costs of an all day centre.

The lack of understanding about the total processes of licensing and chartering by the Pacific centres concerns MOE staff. The groups do not seem to understand that with chartering goes further management and policy development, for example making links back to the DOPs, and showing they can be a good employer from day one. Further, it can lead to centres *falling over* before they really get started. The incentive for groups seems to be to get the government funding, not necessarily to raise the level of quality, MOE staff claim.

The nature and extent of ECD post-licensing support for Pacific centres was seen by MOE staff to be an issue, because their Pacific Coordinators appear to be thinly spread in some areas, and are also involved in licensing and chartering, professional development, and other government-funded projects. Post-licensing and professional development contracts have been let to other providers (outside of ECD), such as the New Zealand Childcare Association, Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa.

Further mention was made about the importance of the community status of ECD Pacific coordinator. In some cases it can enhance the work, but in other ways it can inhibit development, where centres feel they cannot question or argue with someone of higher status. Recently, in one region, there was an issue about appointments, where it was perceived that a person was said to be shoulder-tapped, rather than the position being advertised widely in the Pacific communities. They believe ECD's role needs to include the community and parent development aspect.

ECD national staff

ECD's Pacific Islands Services (ECD, 2001a) report notes that a number of centres want to move towards licensing and chartering, but find the progress slow in developing resources, facilities, staff and quality programmes to *make it happen*. The length of time taken for this process has been documented by Mara (1998).

One highlighted problem was that of attracting (and keeping) suitably trained staff with the relevant Pacific languages and skills, particularly for the smaller Pacific ethnic groups. It was reported that parents found the high costs of licensed centre fees to be a significant barrier. Waiting lists for licensed and chartered centres are now recorded by ECD: there are currently (as at June 2001) 592 children on waiting lists for 47 centres, and 9 of these centres have a waiting list of 10-36 children. Such centres are being advised by ECD to set up their own associated PIECGs to feed into the licensed and chartered services.

ECD regional staff

ECD staff in all three regions mentioned a number of the issues expressed at National level. They added a number of more specific regional practices that they felt were also important. One region reported that PIECGs receive printed material, followed by a personal visit. *Usually a PIECG wants to become a licensed and chartered service so 'we drip-feed' the regulations and requirements, so that by the time it comes around they are more confident about the process.* The parents are also gathered together, and ECD Pacific co-ordinators will inform them about the requirements and whether they would like to attain their *ultimate goal*.

However, ECD regional staff said the whole process towards achieving licensing and chartering can take on average about 5 years. Two of the Pacific groups in the sample took considerably longer: 12 years and 8 years. Pacific co-ordinators also must operate in two languages, to translate regulations and adapt the information so it is understood and effective. This adds to the time required for the process, compared to the work of ECD with general groups.

One region also mentioned the issue of trained and qualified staff for centres, and reported that as it takes three years to get a qualification, they urge mothers to work for their qualification while they are waiting for the licensing and chartering process to be completed.

In another region Pacific co-ordinators noted that budgets and budgeting support are an important part of their work, as they provide a basis for developing staff roster systems and outlining management responsibilities. The Pacific co-ordinators believe they foster quality by encouraging staff to gain appropriate qualifications and encouraging parent involvement and participation. They believe this involvement is crucial in sustaining the process towards licensing and chartering.

Centre fees were mentioned as a barrier to parents' involvement, as were the costs of getting children to the centre. In two cases the Pacific co-ordinators mentioned deciding which centres to work with, and in what ways, as difficult decisions to make. They feel bound to respond to all inquiries, and feel unable to refuse any request for help from Pacific centres or groups.

One of the regional Pacific co-ordinators estimates that the average time for licensing and chartering of PIECGs in her region is about 8 to 10 years. *It is a lot of work and effort for parents and co-ordinators have to explain what work is required and what it will mean.* She suggested that ECD should help parents and centres to develop a long term plan, and to think about whether there is a need for a (fully) licensed and chartered centre. This co-ordinator sees it as her priority to provide the Pacific communities with accurate information about the process. Meanwhile (during the long time taken for licensing and chartering) qualified Pacific staff in the groups are being lost to other (palagi) centres: *Those centres do pay more to their teachers.*

In this same region there is one group of parents who have decided to remain as a licence-exempt group, because they want to stay involved with their children, and because they believe that their Pacific language is being used more in the playgroups than in the licensed centres. The Pacific co-ordinator supports their decision.

Parents/centres

Two of the licensed and chartered centres in this sample had only recently achieved licensing and chartering (in 2001). Both reported a long association with ECD, one over 6 years, the other over 7 years. The advice and support they received in order to achieve licensing was *crucial -we would not have done it without them.* They reported monthly (or fortnightly) person-to-person contact by their ECD co-ordinator, and in addition phone contacts. Both centres felt able to telephone their Pacific co-ordinators whenever they had any questions.

The licensed and chartered centres received both printed and verbal advice on budgeting, management, curriculum (in one case both documents: Te Whāriki and the Ta'iala/Samoan Language Curriculum), costings, plans for the buildings, discretionary funding, parent involvement, resource consents, building and playground design, and workshops have been provided. In one case the co-ordinator helped to set up the centre and organised the official opening - *it was a tribute to them (ECD).*

The Pacific licensed and chartered centres were positive about ECD's work: *Having a centre licensed and chartered. The fact they've done this for us is a sign of success.*

One centre said that *all the bureaucracy* made them feel like giving up at times, but their co-ordinator kept on encouraging them. *Even when parents' involvement fell off she encouraged us to keep holding the meetings. She helped us with the design to ensure the internal windows were the right height, helped with budgeting, management committee, ordering equipment, sorting out everyone's roles, resource consent and discretionary grants.* The Pacific co-ordinator also recommended that a staff member be released to observe in another *best practice* centre and this was now happening. Similar ECD support happened in the other centres, ensuring that they became licensed.

In relation to post-licensing support and advice, one centre was not sure what they were able to access, but they said they would contact ECD again soon. They needed help with management issues and parent involvement, including how parents can be involved with their children's learning, and wanted a parent workshop to be held.

Effectiveness of ECD: Factors within the organisation

ECD regional staff

In addition to the factors already outlined for general groups and centres, the following arose in particular from ECD Pacific co-ordinators' viewpoints.

Factors working against effectiveness:

- *constant restructuring – we have had 3 major ones and a couple of small ones. Staff are waiting for the next one to happen;*
- time required to establish relationships within the organisation to be effective;
- time for more visits to centres and playgroups;
- difficulty in refusing to respond to all requests, making priorities;
- responding effectively to a diversity of groups and needs.

Factors working to enhance effectiveness:

- Pacific co-ordinators were reticent about their own achievements and about factors within the organisation, but stated that their community knowledge and community standing is a key to their success.

Effectiveness of ECD: Factors outside the organisation

ECD regional staff

Competition was mentioned by two of the larger regions as being an external factor to ECD effectiveness. In terms of Pacific early childhood education, alternative providers of advice and support (and professional development), such as Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council Aotearoa, Anau Ako Pasifika, and the Colleges of Education, are working in the same field as ECD. In one reported case, a national Pacific early childhood association and provider was advising centres against using ECD for advice and support. In another case, the level of advice from the competing contractor was not of sufficient standard to license the centre, and ECD personnel had to step in and assist.

Funding was a factor mentioned by all regions as a barrier to effectiveness. The ability of ECD to be flexible and responsive was constrained to some extent by outputs and budgets. The fact that the Pacific co-ordinators had to work with and through community leaders and key people, and the fact that ECD staff needed to be fully aware of the local politics and diverse agendas, placed extra time demands on them.

Another barrier reported was the miscommunication or lack of consistency towards Pacific provisions by the statutory organisations such as MOE and the ERO. One example given was where the bedding used by the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centre (PIECC) was tapa-cloth. ERO queried its use, but the Health and Safety Officer and MOE had approved its use. The centre was confused, and asked ECD what to do! Such debates over cultural aspects confuse the

centre staff and management as to who actually has the authority to finally decide. As stated before, the centres in the sample perceive ECD as strongly supporting the maintenance of their languages, cultural values and practices.

Another external pressure from the parents and Pacific communities on ECD is that there is a perceived need by the Pacific centres and groups to *match up* to the palagi centres, otherwise they are not providing 'quality'. The road to licensing and chartering is unanimously supported by the Pacific co-ordinators, even though they are aware of the pressures and stresses placed on Pacific communities, and the average length of time it takes to achieve that status.

It was reported that one important factor which impinges on the effectiveness of ECD is that of family and group transience. *A cheaper area of housing is usually not a stable community as people move through to somewhere else.* As she reported, the development with one group can be lost or undermined by this movement. This is additional to the usual pattern of families 'moving through' as their children grow older, and consequently demands for provisions change.

Issues of attaining and sustaining quality provision constitute a further challenge for ECD. The Pacific co-ordinators thought that becoming licensed is one way to ensure both a source of employment and sound educational provision for Pacific children. Mostly the co-ordinators describe their work as fostering confidence in parents when working with their children, and this takes time to build up. As one worker reported, they have to convince mothers of *the benefits of their children playing and exploring rather than sitting and reading and writing as they expect in a 'preschool'*.

Future Perspectives:

The three groups of respondents were all asked what factors they thought would endanger and what factors would enhance the future provision of support and advice to PIECCs and PIECGs.

MOE national office and management centres staff

There were no views expressed by MOE on the future of Pacific early childhood provisions, except by staff in one management centre, who commented that there should be a specific categorisation for funding Pacific groups and centres, alongside specific categorisations for Maori and private provision.

ECD regional staff

All those questioned agreed that a lack of funding and resources could endanger their future prospects. They wanted money for more people *on the ground*, to meet the demands of the Pacific groups and centres and to assist in resource developments. *Our kits and equipment get shoddy and we need to restock all the time.*

We spend time visiting parents and community people and encouraging them as part of our work and we need more time and resources for that. One Pacific co-ordinator feels that the Pacific playgroups are suffering from this lack of resources and *there should be equal quality across the board.* Demands and needs of Pacific parents are higher. *Licensed and chartered centres still need more funding to keep going (in playgroups).*

In another region the co-ordinator said that funding and resourcing needs to go into better information to groups about the licensing and chartering process so they know what to expect. One comment was made about how meetings co-ordinated by MOE have been helpful for getting and sharing information. Given the prolonged period of time taken by the sample groups: *twelve long years*, 8 years, and 6 years, to become licensed and chartered, the explanation for this must be explored. For example, what role has ECD played in the giving of information, support and advice throughout such a long period of time?

The same person commented that ECD's future lies in the credibility and success of their staff, and that she knows there are many Pacific co-ordinators who work hard to achieve this. Success has come as more centres are opened. More help is needed for Pacific co-ordinators to work effectively into the future. They should be provided with opportunities to improve their own qualifications.

Particular issues for the Pacific stream

The goal of progressing Pacific early childhood education groups to achieve licensed and chartered status has been a priority in MOE policy and ECD work, as well as with the groups themselves. The experience to date has shown:

- the importance of both cultural knowledge and acceptability and early childhood education expertise for ECD's Pacific co-ordinators in order to work successfully with Pacific groups;
- some tensions between groups' ownership, and their priorities, and the emphases in early childhood education regulations;
- drops in participation where becoming licensed and chartered has meant increased costs, and therefore the need to charge parents fees;
- a longer time-period to become licensed and chartered, due in part to each Pacific co-ordinator doing their own translations of regulations and information, and the dearth of qualified Pacific staff able to teach early childhood education in Pacific languages.

A programme logic matrix for one ECD service: licensing and chartering advice and support

This matrix reports key linked comparisons for understanding ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support as perceived by participants in our evaluation.

Outcomes hierarchy	Success criteria	Factors within the control of the service	Factors outside/partially outside the control of the service	Activities resources
<p>Ultimate outcome High quality early childhood education services that are viable and available where they are needed.</p>	Centres use post-licensing advice and support and opportunities for professional development.	Provision of appropriate post-licensing advice and support and professional development.	<p>Adequacy of ECD funding.</p> <p>Adequacy of early childhood funding.</p> <p>Availability of qualified teachers.</p> <p>Take-up of ECD services.</p>	Post-licensing advice and support and professional development.
<p>Qualified teachers are appointed.</p> <p>Centre budgets, building plans, equipment, environmental design, staffing schedules, and policies underpin quality.</p> <p>Community needs assessment is comprehensive.</p> <p>Volunteer workload is reduced.</p> <p>Centres receive discretionary grants where they are eligible.</p>	<p>Centre meets full licensing requirement within appropriate time-frame.</p> <p>Centre meets MOE probationary licensing requirements on first application.</p> <p>Groups make successful application for discretionary grant.</p>	<p>The provision of timely, professional, up to date advice and support on all aspects of licensing and chartering.</p> <p>The skills and knowledge of co-ordinators in all specialist aspects of licensing and chartering and educational environments.</p>	<p>Availability of teachers.</p> <p>Centres may apply to be licensed without ECD's approval</p> <p>Centres may ignore ECD's advice</p> <p>Regulations prescribe minimum standards not quality.</p> <p>Discretionary grants pool is capped.</p>	<p>Staff selection criteria include appropriate ethnicity, early childhood qualifications.</p> <p>Professional development, remuneration and support for staff.</p>
<p>Immediate impact Groups and individuals decide to plan for licensing and chartering.</p> <p>Groups and individuals understand why quality is important and the contribution of environment and staffing to quality. They can assess costs realistically.</p> <p>Groups and individuals understand the full implications of licensing and chartering early in the process.</p>	Groups and individuals using ECD are well-informed about the licensing and chartering process and the link with quality.	<p>The ability of ECD co-ordinators to work with a range of people and organisations.</p> <p>The responsiveness of ECD to group and individual needs.</p>	<p>Responsiveness of Document of Accountability to needs of community for early childhood provision.</p> <p>Extent to which ECD funding is sufficient for ECD to undertake quality advice and support.</p> <p>Existence of other contractors to undertake licensing and chartering advice and support.</p>	<p>Ability for staff to specialise and become multi-skilled.</p> <p>The range and quality of ECD resources.</p>
<p>Outputs Parents know of and contact ECD or ECD finds out about groups and contacts them.</p>				

5. ECD ADVICE AND SUPPORT TO LICENCE-EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

Perspectives on the nature and purpose of ECD's advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups

MOE staff

MOE national staff identified a number of purposes for ECD's work with licence-exempt groups. They have a *regulatory function*, involving development of guidelines for receipt of funding and checks on eligibility. They distribute funding. They also support licence-exempt groups. MOE acknowledged that it had a very scant understanding of what ECD actually does in supporting licence-exempt groups, except they knew that giving workshops was an element, as was visiting groups a certain number of times in a year.

They described short term goals as process oriented (the mechanics of operating as a playgroup). Long term goals were described as maintaining the playgroup as an entity or it becoming licensed and chartered, improving quality of provision and parent support and development. An issue for MOE is to what extent the quality goal is being actively pursued, and how systematically it is being pursued.

I think if [quality] isn't a goal, ...licence-exempt is a dangerous place to be....if they are of low quality the research will tell us you could be doing more harm than good.

MOE staff thought one problem is that there was no way of recognising and gauging the quality of playgroups and the value that is brought by individual parents interacting with their own children. Requirements were minimal administrative ones. There was no yardstick for quality. MOE staff acknowledged that more work around indicators of quality needs to be done. They thought part of the policy challenge in this area lay in the differences among playgroups themselves, and whether policy could identify their different needs. There could, for example, be a new funding system based on the differential needs of the groups that ECD supports.

MOE suggested that one an indicator of whether ECD's advice and support was successful could be *an identified mismatch between the highest level you could hope of participation, and actual participation of groups in particular regions*, especially if groups are being targeted for ECD to work with.

MOE management centre staff were not able to describe what ECD does in relation to licence-exempt centres. However, staff from one management centre staff said they saw the role of ECD as *growing participation and capacity*. These staff thought MOE needs information about where playgroups are, and about what constitutes quality in playgroups.

ECD national staff

ECD national staff identified a number of core components of ECD's work with licence-exempt playgroups:

- encouragement and advice on setting up a playgroup;
- administering funding;
- assisting groups with management.
- fostering a quality educational environment, with a focus on the principles of Te Whāriki. An important aspect is providing opportunities for children to socialise with each other and with adults;
- offering support for parents and their development, and an outcome of better parenting. Playgroup attendance may have spin-offs for parents and families from parent involvement, such as their accessing other services like health, reducing their isolation and supporting their wellbeing, and extra support for some groups such as teenage parents, new immigrants and families in refuges;
- offering opportunity for parents to interact with other adults and children of their own ethnic group and to preserve their own language through community language playgroups.

They see playgroups as a valid form of early childhood education in their own right.

We see [playgroups] as another option within the diversity of early childhood education, rather than being a forerunner to something else. Even though Pacific groups and Maori groups are beginning to use it as a stepping stone for being licensed. For rural communities it often is the only early childhood education service available.

ECD national staff thought that signs of ECD's success would be:

- well operating high quality playgroups;
- playgroups using ECD resources;
- learning from ECD's work being transferred by parents to their work in playgroups and at home.

ECD regional staff

Like the national staff, ECD regional staff stressed that licence-exempt playgroups are a viable form of early childhood education that is different from what is offered by licensed and chartered services, and caters for different needs.

They are amazingly different from licensed centres. Parents are working alongside their own kids..... They do fantastic things. They are an exciting entity in their own right. ...They should have recognition and status.

Staff in one regional office were critical of a belief that licence-exempt services were not as good as licensed services, and thought there was insufficient knowledge and valuing of them. They pointed out that licence-exempt playgroups are diverse. There are distinct categories within them: Pacific groups, Puna, general and community language groups. They thought they should not be lumped together.

ECD regional staff repeated the views of ECD national staff on the value of parent involvement in playgroups for parents and families. In addition, they emphasised its value to parents of younger children, aged 0-3, who wanted to be at home with their children.

There's a desert in terms of services for little children, babies.

In the views of ECD regional staff, the following would be signs of success:

- improved quality, shown through adults' responsive interactions with children, the activities undertaken and a safe and stimulating environment;
- provision and use of equipment that encourages learning and development;
- use of ECD resources and publications;
- transfer of learning from parent workshops to playgroup;
- attitudinal shifts in parents about children's learning;
- parents managing the playgroup well.
- no splits in the parent group;
- parents wanting to attend and getting something for themselves;
- linkages with other children's services, e.g. health, schools, welfare.

ECD regional staff gave specific descriptions of the work they do with playgroups. These covered all the areas described by national staff, but in addition demonstrated how they work with playgroups. All the regional offices described a range of methods: visiting; workshops in local areas on topics as diverse as art for playgroups, messy play, emergent literacy, managing your child's behaviour, biting, running your playgroup; providing resources and being available by telephone. There was no single prescription for what is offered, as the needs of each group vary. There is now a system to classify playgroups according to need, and time allocated to each varies accordingly. Before the classification system, most were visited three times a year.

ECD has developed some national resources which staff give to groups where appropriate. These are:

- *Establishing a community playgroup* (Early Childhood Development, 2000). This booklet describes briefly what a playgroup is, legal requirements, starting a playgroup, funding eligibility and grants, running a playgroup, Maori cultural learning, education programme, planning play and areas of play.
- *Equipment guidelines for playgroups* (Early Childhood Development, 1998).
- *Administration kit* (Early Childhood Development, 1998).

- *Learning environments for playgroups* (Early Childhood Development, 2001). This new resource is intended to help playgroups provide quality educational experiences and environments for children and adults. It has sections on the playgroup environment, developing the education programme, creating play opportunities for infants, creating play opportunities for toddlers, creating play opportunities for young children, areas of play, family and dramatic play, creative play, books language and music, physically active play, constructive play, exploratory play, manipulative play, planning for outdoor play and useful books and resources. It is in the form of a ring binder so that useful further resources can be added.
- *Quality in early childhood education* (Early Childhood Development, 2001).

ECD co-ordinators have also developed their own resources, including books for parents, and have a range of equipment that they can lend to playgroups. Each office had its own unique resources. As an example, in one of the offices, we saw some imaginative resources for specific playgroups that local ECD staff had produced, making use of coloured photographs taken by digital camera. One, produced after an art workshop, used photographs and documentation of children's learning. It was presented in a spiral binder to the playgroup as a record and reminder of the work for children and parents. This work fits well with understanding of the value of documentation in illustrating the learning that has occurred here and its usefulness as a resource for parents, children and teachers. Other resources, also using coloured photographs, included a presentation of science ideas for playgroups and a song book for playgroups. Some of the co-ordinators in this office have written their own useful articles on materials and experiences for children.

Staff at this office have also developed a newsletter about the seven community language playgroups in their area. These playgroups are Polish, Greek, Russian, Indian, Japanese, Deutsche Spielgruppe German and Yau-Yih-Yun Chinese. They have produced a video, *Community language playgroups in action*.

The resource preparation is time-consuming, but provides a wealth of attractively presented information and ideas and helps groups link with a wider world. A question is whether more could be done at a national level, so that individual offices do not duplicate efforts, and regular publications are made available.

Parents

Parents were asked about ECD's advice and support under five headings:

- working with children;
- quality and the early childhood curriculum;
- managing the playgroup;
- playground, building layout and equipment;
- other.

Six of the nine general playgroups reported on work that ECD had done in respect to how parents can work with children, quality and the early childhood curriculum. The other three, all from one area, reported only that resources had been given to them about these subjects.

Differences in the responses from parents about the advice and support ECD had given their playgroups seemed to reflect differences in the way specific staff worked and in the time they had available.

In one area, parents said there were regular visits (three or four times a year) when the co-ordinator brought an activity and other resources. In one of these playgroups, parents contrasted the style of one co-ordinator, who stayed for the whole session, with that of another co-ordinator, who had only a limited time for a visit (because other visits were scheduled and she had large distances to travel). They preferred an unhurried visit, because:

- it enabled time for any parent to talk to the co-ordinator in a relaxed way;
- the whole session could be used to good purpose in working with children and demonstrating how activities could be used in the playgroup and at home.

She is like a child in herself, active among the kids and showing parents how they could behave.

In this area, ECD activities introduced over the last year that parents mentioned were music and dancing, collage, outdoor skills, hand-eye co-ordination, weaving and use of recyclable material. Parents from one of the playgroups said that the co-ordinator always gave pointers on what to do at home as well as at the playgroup. Parents in this area said they were invited to attend a workshop on ECD's new *Learning environments for playgroups kit*. Those who attended found this to be valuable, although two playgroups were still waiting in September to receive their copy of the kit ordered in June.

In the second area, parents reported that regular workshops were held, focusing on the interests of the playgroup. These included workshops on clay and natural materials and science. In the *natural material* workshop, ECD assisted parents to understand how to work with these materials.

In the third area, only one playgroup mentioned workshops, and said that ECD had let them down over a planned workshop.

ECD set up a workshop last year. We turned up but they forgot – they had nothing set up. We were supposed to be puppet making but we ended up doing music.

In respect of another planned ECD course, this same playgroup was critical that non-playgroup parents could not attend.

[ECD] had a first aid course but we ran one ourselves 'cos one of the parents was a nurse and we had a few non-playgroup parents who wanted to come. Non-playgroup parents can't go to ECD courses. One girl went to their course.

Only some playgroups had ECD advice on managing the playgroup. But some said they were well established and did not need advice.

All parents reported that ECD *looked at their books* and gave funding information and advice. Some of this went to the extent in one playgroup of the co-ordinator ringing several times to remind the playgroup when the funding forms were due, and then filling in the blank spaces for the playgroup by telephone.

Three playgroups in one area gauged that advice on finances, equipment and distribution of booklets was the only contribution ECD made to them. However, one of these thought that ECD's emphasis with a new co-ordinator appointed at the beginning of the year would be better.

She checks the books and looks at the financial side of things. She gives us stuff to read like new pamphlets on things we can do. ...

[The co-ordinator] has input into funding. She interviews us about our numbers, checks the figures and looks at what we are spending. Then we get the form and fill it out about what we are trying to spend the funding on. It's a questionnaire and the funding is based on what we are needing to spend for the cycle and our numbers.

We have contact when the funding forms come in. [The co-ordinator] gets us to sign them. [Over four years] we've had minimal contact. We've had a hand-out on guidelines for play and equipment. We've already had those things anyway. [The co-ordinator] recommended equipment for us to buy. We've had fundraising advice. We've also had a few flyers from REAP that told us about local workshops. They would look after us more than ECD.

The timeliness of funding advice seemed to be variable, with two playgroups saying they would like to have had help when the 'books' were handed over to them. They had not explicitly asked for such help, however.

Most playgroups received advice about equipment and environment. Some borrowed resources from ECD. Advice about the environment related to how to support children's educational interests or to their safety and health.

She helped us re-arrange the block area to encourage girls to play there and get more involved.

In one area, three of the playgroups said that co-ordinators provided support to individual parents. Some ECD courses were held for parents (behaviour management was a popular course). Some of the respected attributes of their co-ordinator in working with children and parents were noted by one of these playgroups. These were:

- recognising how people are feeling;
- not putting people down;
- taking time to informally talk with parents.

In another area, parents in one playgroup reported on how the co-ordinator helped to resolve conflict within their parent group. Playgroups in the third area did not mention support for parents as one of the things the co-ordinator did.

The playgroups had fairly common perceptions of what ECD is trying to achieve by its advice and support. There were several key areas that they thought ECD wanted to have an impact on. These were:

- a better quality learning environment. *Happier, safer learning/better playgroups/trying to show that playgroups in a small environment are a good way to get an early childhood education for kids in a relaxed atmosphere/a place to let kids go for it;*
- to support administration;
- funding and accountability for funding;
- to provide a *service at low or no cost to parents;*
- to support parents, e.g. *getting people out of the house and educating parents;*

They thought ECD would be successful if the following signs were visible:

- *getting positive feedback/no internal problems or dissention/happy kids and happy parents/people coming back;*
- *children coming in and being able to play and use things to their advantage/The kids are interacting and there is no bullying. The kids make good friends and learn to play with adults well;*
- *money coming in when the funding round happens;*
- *parents having time to meet people and do their craft.*

One general comment was that the sign that ECD is successful would be *running a good playgroup.*

Issues arising from perspectives on purpose and outcomes of playgroups

There were differences in perspectives between ECD and MOE staff on the purpose of playgroups, and in understanding of the *nuts and bolts* of ECD's work in advising and supporting them. This was especially evident in the *success indicators* which MOE staff described in terms of government goals for increased participation and quality provision, and in their acknowledgement that they did not have a good understanding of playgroups. ECD staff described success indicators in wider terms. As well as quality provision, these included parents' own learning about children's learning, parents *getting something for themselves* and the development of collaborative relationships with other services for families. Both national and regional ECD staff expected there to be signs that ECD's work would transfer to what happens within the playgroup and for parents and families. While they did not specifically mention the word 'participation' as an indicator of success, their description of what playgroups do showed that this is important for them. Clearly, ECD sees playgroups as offering more than early childhood education alone.

Parents talked about success in three areas: ‘quality’ education, management of the playgroup, and how the playgroup could benefit them. These themes come out in the next section, where we describe the impacts of ECD’s advice and support. However, like ECD staff views, parents’ views of the purpose of playgroups are as much to do with their own benefit as parents as with the benefit of their children.

MOE staff thought there needs to be a discussion about ‘what is quality in a licence-exempt playgroup?’ The evidence here suggests that it would be useful to broaden the discussion to include ‘what is the purpose of a licence-exempt playgroup?’ The benefits to parents and the parent learning component seem to be as significant as the opportunities they offer to children to participate in an educational setting. The evidence on what playgroups do indicates that these issues should not be divorced from each other. Such discussion would shed light on the broader question of ‘what is quality?’

Another useful policy discussion would be on ‘what do we mean by participation?’ The concept of ‘participation’ in a playgroup needs to include parent involvement in programme, use of services co-ordinated or offered by ECD, and involvement in running the playgroup. We heard evidence of reasons that playgroup attendance may be sporadic, for example calving in farming communities, and it would be simplistic to use ‘attendance’ as an indicator of participation. While this has not been proposed by any of our interviewees, a warning is given here because attendance is used as a criteria for funding within the licensed and chartered sector and for funding of playgroups. It is often what politicians mean when they estimate ‘participation’.

A third issue that the interviews reveal is the lack of detailed knowledge about playgroups within MOE. The question of how well-informed policy can be developed in respect to licence-exempt playgroups is therefore an issue. MOE is responsible for policy advice about them, but does not yet have good understanding of them. ECD itself has a great deal to contribute to policy development.

The evidence from parents on what ECD does showed much variability between different areas, probably because of the way in which individual co-ordinators work. ECD staff descriptions of what they did and parents’ perceptions of what ECD staff did, do not always match up. This could be mainly because our playgroup sample and ECD regional staff did not in all cases match up, in that the sample was drawn from two ‘deep rural’ areas whereas our ECD regional office sample was from three city areas. We did not, for example, see the use of the resource materials described in this section. However, the parent perceptions point to the need for ECD to be clear about their expectations for advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups, and to have mechanisms in place to gauge the quality of their work. As well, ECD staff need to be offered professional development to support them in their work.

Perspectives on impacts of ECD's advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups

MOE national staff

MOE national staff said that the kinds of data (such as could be gathered in a qualitative action research type of study) that would support claims of ECD's effectiveness have not been reported. They said the absence of any evidence except largely anecdotal evidence can be partly attributed to the policy vacuum about what constitutes quality in a licence-exempt playgroup. MOE staff thought they had not been clear enough about the policy framework around licence-exempt playgroups to give ECD sufficient guidance about what MOE wants from this area.

ECD staff

ECD national staff thought the impact of ECD's work with licence-exempt groups ranged across a number of areas. These were:

- supporting playgroups to exist, and so providing access to families who would not otherwise access early childhood education. Playgroups themselves meet a range of needs that other forms of early childhood provision do not meet, as discussed in the previous section;
- working to improve the quality of playgroups;
- supporting some specific client groups, e.g. 'those at very high risk of poor outcomes', teen parents, women in refuges, new immigrants and parents from a particular ethnic community who want to preserve their language;

We've found in terms of the Parents as First Teachers programme when you are dealing with teen parents that you can actually get better action going when the parents are together. So they certainly prefer to be together to talk about the Dolly magazine and the latest hairdo, and as part and parcel of that the parent educator can do the demonstration of the appropriate interaction with children or capture the moment for supporting a parent's action or understanding of child behaviour or development;

- providing advice and support for parents as educators. *We see it as a model that not only brings the children in and they do their activities, but there's ... much more potential to support changed parental behaviour and home activity than kindergartens or centre;*
- contributing to some parents' own learning in ways that open career opportunities for them;
- developing the skill level of community members;
- reducing isolation of parents;
- contributing to the well-being of children and parents.

>

ECD regional staff and parents in combination conveyed a picture of licence-exempt playgroups as a service that could interweave high quality education with parents' own learning, support and empowerment. ECD therefore could have an impact by strengthening and supporting playgroups in these roles.

Ideally, ECD can offer professional development and support that contributes to a good learning environment for children, parent understanding of children's learning and development, and practical ways in which parents can enhance their child's learning. Parents are working alongside their children at a time when parents *want to know the most*. Resources and activities taken home reinforce the learning at home and the continuity between home and playgroup. Parents themselves may be supported through attendance at the playgroup. Some parents attend ECD workshops and become keen to become early childhood teachers as a result of their involvement. The parents whom we interviewed described some of these spin-offs.

Parents working in playgroups make worthwhile contributions to running services for children. Reportedly, some of these parents continued their contributions when their children went to school, through involvement in the school Board of Trustees, Parent Teacher Association or other voluntary activities. Some have specific goals, such as to work within their own cultural framework and language.

Some playgroups want to be licensed and chartered and are being helped to achieve this.

Parents

We asked the playgroups what impact ECD's advice and support had had on the playgroup generally, on the quality of the programme, on the administration of the playgroup, on the playgroup environment, on support for families, and on whether families wanted to take part. Like the responses to the questions on what ECD does, again there were variations linked to varied experiences within the playgroups.

The following were a selection of the range of perceived general impacts on the quality of the programme: *helping us sort out our programme/always beneficial/don't know that there were any/a limited impact - the co-ordinator hasn't advised us much*. One positive description was of a co-ordinator who managed to engender a sense of calm and purposeful activity. The playgroup parents said they always listened to her ideas and used them, even if they modified them slightly.

Parents in only three playgroups thought there was an impact on the quality of the programme.

[The co-ordinator's] had a big impact. We always listen to what is said and modify it to fit in with the kids.

The programme things are helpful. ECD makes good suggestions to help get the children involved more.

Some playgroups said they found ECD administration kit to be helpful. Other playgroups thought they did not need much help with management, especially when they had been operating for some time. There was general agreement that ECD's advice and support had an impact on funding and financial reporting. Sometimes it was simply to give positive reinforcement, but this in itself was seen as valuable.

If I'm stuck with the financial side she's always there to help.

How to run a group but not be in your face all the time

She always says our books are good and up-to-date.

Five groups thought that ECD had an impact on the playgroup environment, and ECD kit was mentioned by many. The following areas were detailed:

- advice on equipment;
- ideas – *She always looks at what we've had and ideas are flying;*
- information about fencing.

Working with parents was an area where four groups thought ECD's work had an impact. The work included:

- suggesting options to parents with problems with their own children;
- clarifying issues when there was conflict within the parent group;
- involving parents in learning about children and activities to do with them;
- being available to talk to individuals about personal issues.

Two playgroups thought it was the job of REAP rather than ECD to encourage participation in early childhood education. One playgroup thought that the co-ordinator generated enthusiasm and therefore encouraged participation in the playgroup.

Benefits of playgroups for children and parents

As well as asking about the impact of ECD's work, we asked parents about the benefits of playgroups themselves for children and parents. Parents gave an overwhelming endorsement of the value of playgroups, which closely matched the perceptions of regional ECD staff about the role they play in family life. Their faces lit up and they spoke with enthusiasm about what playgroup meant to them.

First, parents thought playgroups *did important things for children*. All the playgroup parents remarked on the opportunity for children to socialise with other children and adults. Parents in rural playgroups often painted a picture of their children living quite a distance from other families. The playgroup was a regular chance for them to be with children other than their own siblings (if they had siblings), learning valuable skills of give and take and caring for others. Parents said their children developed competencies and skills. It gave them a head start for going to school or another early childhood service. It also gave children a chance to be with a parent when she/he wasn't distracted.

The children are spending time with their Mum/caregiver who have quality one-to one time to spend with the children in a place where there's no washing to fold.

Second, parents thought there were real benefits for themselves in participating in the playgroup. They made friends and got support from being with each other. *If I moved we'd stay in touch*. They got advice about their children from others who had experienced similar issues. They said that it was helpful to know that others went through the same things with their children. Two groups of playgroup parents said they got ideas from playgroup that they could take home. One parent recounted how she learned to use cardboard boxes as a resource at home when previously

she would have discarded them. Another told how her own confidence in working with children had grown, to the extent that she would now *sing along with the kids* – an unheard of activity when she first came to the playgroup.

There are lots of young parents out there who do not have contact with peers or family. It's a good support for people who are lonely.

It gives parents confidence to carry on at home.

It makes you realise, I'm not the only one to have problems. We all go through it. It's always comforting when another child loses the plot.

Two playgroups described the benefits of playgroup involvement for the wider *community good*. They thought parents achieve a *sense of purpose* and are respected in the community when they take on roles within the playgroup or are participating in it. Their involvement could carry on to school involvement.

Parents need to feel they have a right to be part of education. If they are instrumental in the preschool they are more likely to be involved at school.

Issues arising from perspectives on impacts

Two themes come through in this section about perceptions of impacts. One is the value of playgroups in themselves. A second is the value of ECD's advice and support.

Parents and ECD staff were in agreement about the role playgroups can play. As well as providing an early childhood education for children, their descriptions fell into the three areas that Margy Whalley (1997) describes for effective parenting programmes. These are:

- action for children, where parents learn about their own children's learning processes;
- action for parents, where the parents are learning and doing things for themselves;
- action for others (citizenship), where parents are taking responsibility for running the service.

Like the previous section, this section highlights the need to regard playgroups as a parenting programme, as well as an early childhood service. There are benefits to this type of programme, which involves parents getting together in a group setting, that cannot be realised in an individualised parenting programme. This framework then leads to new questions about how playgroups should be supported and funded.

The perceived impact of ECD's advice and support was variable, and seemed to be dependent on a number of factors: the skills of the co-ordinator; the degree of knowledge of people within the playgroup; and the existence of other services such as REAP within the area. There are some hints of factors that contribute to 'successful' advice and support' and these are considered next.

Factors associated with effectiveness of licence-exempt playgroups

MOE staff

MOE national staff thought factors relating to effectiveness were:

- recruitment of Pacific staff to work with Pacific services and Maori staff to work with Maori services;
- extent to which work is targeted to the groups that need it.

ECD national staff

ECD national staff thought factors which helped their advice and support to be successful were:

- ECD's community expertise and building relationships;
- an approach to communities that recognises they want to do the best for their children;
- the ability of practitioners to develop very high quality resources.

I feel quite strongly about our community development model. We don't come in with an answer that we prescribe...although there are times when we will actively support to provide the opportunity for that idea to percolate through.

ECD national staff thought factors which hindered ECD from being effective were:

- lack of understanding about the value of licence-exempt playgroups within government and the community;
- inadequate resource levels for ECD's work with licence-exempt playgroups;
- lack of ECD input into policy decisions about licence-exempt playgroups;
- lack of adequate venue for some playgroups;
- poverty of some families.

In their view, MOE, the Minister of Education, and at least until recently, the wider early childhood community, did not value playgroups, therefore ECD had to make ongoing justification for them. This may also have impacted on ECD's funding base. ECD national staff thought they could do much more if there was a greater level of resourcing. They gave as an example the value there would be in having some staff as *roving co-ordinators* to work more intensively with groups where this is desirable. They pointed out that unlike other ECE services, there is no national body for playgroups, so the playgroups tend to operate in isolation without interacting with each other. There is no advocate for playgroups either (except ECD itself).

Some groups are apparently so poor that when asked to bring along egg cartons or ice cream containers, they can't. They just haven't got that even.

ECD national staff thought it was important to make good decisions, based on particular needs of individual playgroups. They said their new categorisation of playgroups according to need means that ECD's work will be targeted to those in most need. They would have liked to have the opportunity to give policy advice on the government budget for licence-exempt playgroups. They thought the uniform increase could have been better allocated differently, i.e. by amount per kind of group, given the high and low needs of the groups ECD works with. MOE national staff also suggested this as a possibility.

ECD regional staff

ECD regional staff thought that the factors which contributed to ECD's success were:

- building community relationships (3);
- an up-to-date data base and information sharing (1), resources (2);
- flexibility to meet needs (2);
- hands-on approach(1);
- trained enthusiastic staff (1);
- ECD professional development(1);
- having a permanent service delivery manager (1).

ECD resources that were appreciated were the development of the intranet, the aim to have greater consistency in access to information, ideas and interpretations, and to have access to pamphlets, publications and equipment and to good tools of work, such as digital cameras. The *Learning environments for playgroups* kit was highly regarded by regional staff.

They said they would like ECD to have a much stronger, well-funded publication arm similar to National Association for the Education of Young Children, and to organise conferences at a national level. Alongside this they wanted ECD to have a research arm and produce high quality research for early childhood.

ECD regional staff generally agreed that staff who work with playgroups should hold an early childhood education teaching qualification and have skills and experience in early childhood teaching. In addition, they supported ECD's focus on employing staff with congruent ethnicity to work with different ethnic groups, especially Maori and Pacific. In one office, staff thought that the pay rates of co-ordinators were poor, creating problems for ECD in its ability to attract and retain good qualified staff. They were critical that the gap between co-ordinators holding an early childhood teaching qualification and others is only \$3,000, given the importance of such a qualification for their work with playgroups.

ECD staff from this office also thought that early childhood knowledge and skills need to maintain currency. Professional development could support and enhance their skills. They appreciated the current focus on 'upgrading qualifications' for those who did not have a Diploma of Teaching, but thought their own needs for professional development should also be met.

ECD regional staff thought that the factors which hindered ECD's effectiveness were:

- contestability;
- poor regulation;
- restrictive Document of Accountability;
- family violence.

Staff from two regional offices were critical of contestability, as they thought this diminished the strength of a co-ordinated approach, the ability to develop within one organisation the skills and experience to work effectively with licence-exempt groups, and the ability to develop and share resources and expertise. They each gave stories of other organisations that had won contestable contracts, and had then given out different advice from ECD advice. It was also wrong advice. They spoke of confusion among groups about the role of each organisation when there are competing organisations. Staff from one of these offices thought that national coverage is important, so that no groups miss out. They thought that national coverage is better assured under non-contestable service delivery. As an example, they were worried about what would happen in Napier, now that the Napier ECD office is not offering professional development. They discussed their concern that the contract for licensing and chartering advice and support has been given to another organisation in Dunedin. *Why fix something that isn't broken?*

Like ECD national office staff, ECD regional staff think that playgroups are not understood and valued. They think that ECD is in a powerful position to bring communities together and that it would be assisted by having a stronger professional 'face'. Another constraint of the Document of Accountability is seen to be the lack of time allocated for public relations and networking. The question of what is community development is often poorly and variously interpreted.

Some constraints affect the operation of some playgroups and so impede ECD's work. These were identified as lack of transport, lack of suitable venue, and communities that have a largely transient population. The parent turnover can make it harder to work with transient groups.

Parents

Parents responded to a question asking for suggestions on how ECD could improve their advice and support and the way they work. They identified a number of things they thought would be helpful, mostly involving hands-on work with ECD co-ordinator and resources. Most of the playgroups wanted more workshops. Some also gave ideas of what they would like workshops on, as follows: creativity, story telling, early childhood philosophy, how to interact with children, health issues, children's massage and equipment ideas.

Most parents would like ECD to visit more often. *In an ideal world, we'd have more visits. Maybe a couple more times a year.* (This was from a playgroup that was visited three times a year.) One request was for ECD to *come in and stay for a whole two hour session – an educative session with the children and parents.* A parent at this playgroup felt that having a co-ordinator who had to travel to meet with them created some problems and meant the co-ordinator was *always in a rush.* She thought quality time with each playgroup is important and that having a locally employed co-ordinator, instead of someone who had to travel, would allow for this. She felt that having a personal relationship with parents is helpful when co-ordinators talk to parents about children's education. Several parents at this playgroup thought there probably needed to be improved staffing to allow this to happen.

One group of parents identified the attributes of a helpful co-ordinator as a person who is full of ideas, approachable and can get down to the children's level.

Another area, highlighted by only one or two playgroups, was to have more help with administration, more information about what is happening locally, more resources and recommended reading, and advertising of the playgroup.

One parent emphasised the importance of having a free government service.

Issues arising from perspectives on factors associated with effectiveness

There was agreement between ECD national and regional staff in some key areas. The broad picture is that ECD's community development approach, the quality and cultural appropriateness of its staffing and its resources are essential to its successful work with playgroups. MOE national staff also saw staffing and the approach to working with playgroups as important. However, factors within ECD environment itself, the broader government policy framework and the wider public value system are also seen to be influential in supporting or inhibiting the capacity of ECD staff to work effectively with playgroups, and the capacity of playgroup families to participate in the playgroup setting. ECD national and regional staff gave differing emphases to these factors, but they were consistent with each other. Regional staff gave more detail about their conditions of work and the impact of government's contestability policies in weakening their own work and confusing parents, and the Document of Accountability in inhibiting what they do, while national staff paid attention to the broader policy framework and how their own understanding could contribute to policy development.

Parents themselves looked at the services from the perspective of their own experiences and needs. Their views lend weight to ECD's argument for a *roving co-ordinator*, better ECD funding (so more visits could be held) and more publication of resources. Ideally playgroup parents would like access to more hands-on involvement from ECD co-ordinator, as well as more workshops and resources. One of the recommendations of the early childhood education long term strategic plan is for access by licence-exempt playgroups to a professional adviser or itinerant teacher. This evidence supports that recommendation.

Perspectives on support for Pacific licence-exempt groups

Most of the experiences and issues identified by the general groups also applied to Pacific licence-exempt groups. No MOE staff made any specific comment about PIECGs.

ECD staff

At a regional level, one ECD Pacific co-ordinator described the impact of ECD's work with licence-exempt centres as the *joy of the Pacific communities, women saying they wished they had this knowledge and training before*. The impact could be seen when mothers allowed their children to play (explore), rather than thinking they should sit and read and write, in a formal manner.

Another said, *It takes the right people, approach and culture and it is important how the (Pacific) person is welcomed by the community....there is an expectation that [ECD's resources] will be in the right language.* The impact of successful Pacific co-ordinators was seen in the level of cooperation and influence they had with a group's community and parents, and the extent to which they enhanced a community's confidence. One Pacific co-ordinator said that smooth relations and good communication between parents indicated good quality, and a positive impact from ECD work.

Pacific parents

The three licence-exempt centres in this study were also appreciative of the help from ECD. They reported that they received advice and support with:

- the purchase of equipment, resources, and playground equipment (including bark chips);
- workshops on a range of topics, such as resource-making ,
- advice on managing their funding, keeping records of attendance and fees;
- buying educational toys and equipment.

Again, contact was usually monthly and all felt that they could make contact by telephone. They also received calls from the co-ordinator between the monthly visits.

There was an agreement across all groups that ECD is set up to help parents to be involved with their children and to help them understand how important play and exploring are for children, so that they can learn. All groups were clear that ECD wanted to support them in maintaining their Pacific languages and cultural values, except in the case of the Pukapukan group who wanted the Pacific co-ordinator to be someone who could speak the Pukapuka language (even though that was presently difficult for ECD to provide).

In relation to PIECGs there exists a very clear and dominant Pacific community expectation that all groups will work towards licensing and chartering as an indication of quality, so that it matches all other early childhood services. The national early childhood Pacific associations have set themselves this goal. In conjunction with the Pacific communities' desires, MOE (through targeted funding, e.g. discretionary grants) has provided incentives for a rapid growth in numbers of licensed and chartered centres. Although this initiative is in line with MOE's recently published Pacific Education Plan, a search of the ERO's website shows the large number of licensed and chartered Pacific centres that have lists of non-compliance factors in their published accountability and discretionary reviews.

The licence-exempt groups said that ECD has been very helpful. They can tell by the way parents understand about the importance of children's learning, how the parents know how to be involved and participate with their children, and how well Samoan and Tokelauan, for example, are supported and fostered. Parent support has been growing as a result of ECD help. Another playgroup said they could tell by the way everyone was working together. *All parents help out now – they are not leaving it all to just one mother to be involved.* All groups reported that help and advice on purchasing play equipment, which in turn helps the children and the parents to learn together, are important.

A programme logic matrix for one ECD service: advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups

This matrix reports key linked comparisons for understanding ECD's advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups as perceived by participants in our evaluation.

Outcomes hierarchy	Success criteria	Factors within the control of the service	Factors outside/partially outside the control of the service	Activities resources
<p>Ultimate outcome Playgroups are a high quality 'learning community' for adults and children. They have linkages with each other and with other services in the community.</p>				
<p>Immediate outcomes Playgroup children receive good quality education, which enhances their competencies, learning dispositions and well-being at home and in the playgroup.</p> <p>Playgroup parents are supported in their role as parents and as learners themselves. They contribute to their children's learning in the playgroup and at home through their own knowledge and attitudes.</p> <p>Playgroup parents take responsibility for running their playgroup.</p>	<p>Playgroup parents engage in responsive, reciprocal interactions with children, provide educational activities in a safe and stimulating environment.</p> <p>Playgroup parents are confident in their parenting knowledge and feel part of a network of support.</p> <p>Playgroup parents achieve a sense of satisfaction and purpose through managing the playgroup.</p>			
<p>Immediate impact Management and educational environment of playgroups are strengthened through ECD advice and support.</p> <p>Playgroup receives ECD funding.</p> <p>Parents and children participate in an early childhood education service.</p> <p>Interest in early childhood education by parents who are in contact with ECD playgroups, ECD information and ECD resources.</p>	<p>Playgroup parents use ECD resources and transfer their learning from ECD co-ordinators to the playgroup setting.</p> <p>Playgroup parents take part in the opportunities offered by ECD for advice and support.</p> <p>Playgroups are established and/or maintained and parents and children participate.</p>	<p>The provision of timely, professional, up to date advice and support.</p> <p>The skills of co-ordinators in working with parents and in providing advice and support on how to foster a quality education environment focused on Te Whāriki.</p> <p>The responsiveness of ECD to playgroup needs.</p> <p>Encouragement of ECD to establish and maintain playgroups.</p>	<p>Extent to which Document of Accountability reflects quality goals and enables responsiveness.</p> <p>Extent to which ECD funding is sufficient for ECD to undertake quality advice and support.</p> <p>Availability of suitable venues and funding for playgroups.</p>	<p>Staff selection criteria include appropriate ethnicity, early childhood qualifications.</p> <p>Professional development, remuneration and support for staff.</p> <p>The range and quality of ECD resources.</p>
<p>Outputs Parents know of and contact ECD or ECD finds out about groups and contacts them.</p>				

6. CONCLUSION

Comparing the perspectives of the key players involved in ECD's provision of services (licensing and chartering advice and support; advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups), it is clear that there are differences and similarities in the ways they view the nature, purpose and effectiveness of ECD's service provision. Analysis of these enables us to identify themes and issues. Although some licence-exempt playgroups develop to become licensed and chartered centres, particularly in the case of Pacific groups, the two ECD services are different and are discussed separately here.

Licensing and chartering advice and support

A key theme in the material gathered for this evaluation of ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support was the central importance of good communication and understanding between ECD and MOE at national and regional levels. There do not seem to be common frameworks of understanding of respective roles and responsibilities, or effective communication, in every area, and this produced frustrations. Some MOE management centre staff are providing forums for people from different organisations, including ECD, to get together, and this seems to be useful. MOE and ECD staff held different views about the way in which quality can be promoted, and the standards that ECD aims to achieve are usually higher than those laid down by regulation. There were different views on how quality could be promoted through licensing and chartering advice and support. These relationships have an impact on ECD's effectiveness.

The early childhood education policy context affects the extent to which ECD can promote high quality provision. Useful suggestions were made about alignment of policies: the discretionary grants criteria needs to be aligned with quality standards for environments and design of buildings, and with requirements to show proof of ongoing viability. The Document of Accountability was regarded as a constraint, but no suggestions were made on how it could be improved. One option may be to move from the current emphasis on setting targets based on previous years to setting targets based on assessment of unmet need. This approach could fit with the proposals in the long term strategic plan consultation document to involve government agencies in planning provision. It should ensure that licensed and chartered centres are developed only where needed, and would remove some of the burden from volunteers.

The work of licensing and chartering advice and support was shown to be highly specialised, requiring an understanding of early childhood teaching and settings and how these contribute to 'quality'. It also requires understanding of areas as diverse as community needs assessment, resource consent, and building design, and co-ordinators need to be able to work with different people. In work within the Pacific Islands stream, there is an extra challenge of employing Pacific Islands staff, with these skills. The desirability of employing specialist co-ordinators in these positions was emphasised. In this respect, contestability which further fragments the work was regarded as damaging.

Groups and individuals with whom ECD worked were generally complimentary about ECD's work, but also described the high workload they themselves incurred. Many ideas about how they could be better supported came from them and from ECD regional staff, including:

- clear understanding of what is involved in licensing and chartering;
- development of exemplars, including exemplars for staffing, organisation, building design, and budgets.

These are fruitful suggestions on how ECD could extend its advice and support for licensing and chartering.

Advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups

A main theme with respect to perspectives on licence-exempt playgroups is that everyone wanted these services to be 'quality' services. However the meaning of 'quality' in this context was an issue that people grappled with. The descriptions of playgroup parents and ECD staff showed that these services offer parenting programmes which are just as important as early childhood education. In the most effective playgroups, there seemed to be benefits to parents from learning about their children's own learning and reinforcing the learning at home, *getting something for themselves* by being supported in the playgroup, and contributing to civic life by helping to run the playgroup. If providing a parenting programme is one of the aims of a licence-exempt playgroup, 'participation' should be gauged broadly, not simply by the attendance and involvement of children. It involves describing the nature of responsive and caring interactions between parent and children, by considering parents' involvement in the programme, their involvement in workshops, and their contribution to the management and support of the playgroup.

It would be useful for MOE and ECD to work together to develop a shared perspective on 'quality' in a licence-exempt playgroup. This could provide an opportunity to develop new criteria and perspectives that would contribute to the development of benchmarks of good practice and new approaches to supporting playgroups, including the skills and processes required for effective community-supportive processes. The 'empowering' approach taken by ECD would fit well with this framework.

Understandably, the knowledge of MOE staff about the actual work of ECD is limited. In relation to licence-exempt playgroups it is very limited, since MOE does not administer the funding or carry out the operational work. There is a role for ECD to have greater involvement in policy development, as recognised by MOE staff.

At an immediate practical level, and in order to sustain and nourish ECD work with playgroups, our evaluation showed there is much that can be done. Our interviews raised issues about:

- the variability in quality of ECD's advice and support;
- the need for staff to be supported through professional development and good working conditions;

- the potential for more resource development at a national level, and the hunger of parents for such resources;
- the examples of imaginative work happening in some areas;
- the benefits of ‘hands-on’ sessions with ECD staff members who are qualified teachers.

The people who are involved in ECD’s services at the grass roots made useful suggestions that could guide the work of ECD for the future. However, this would require a reconsideration of the funding of ECD’s advice and support work and the source of that funding, if all the suggestions were to be adopted.

Further research

Further research could be usefully undertaken with respect to defining quality in a licence-exempt playgroup, and exploring in more depth issues related to the quality and sustainability of Pacific services.

These conclusions are included as recommendations to the summary.

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APPENDIX I

OUTPUT 1A: LICENSING & CHARTERING ADVICE & SUPPORT

output	Service Area	Outcome (purpose)	Output (product/target)	Method Case	Key performance indicators	Quality indicators
1a	license and chartering advice and support (general, Maori & Pacific)	more children participate in community licenced and chartered early childhood education services	provide licence and chartering information and advice on demand to individuals and groups	notify prospective groups of ECD L&C services Respond to information requests within 3 working days assess L & C needs	individuals and groups receive accurate and timely information and advice	advice is given within three working days of request advice and information is culturally appropriate
			work with 90-110 community groups (general, Maori and Pacific) who have committed to becoming licenced and chartered	provide information on L&C in culturally acceptable manner keep register of existing and new centres being informed require centres to sign up for the level of support needed	obtain community groups' agreement to commit to becoming licenced and chartered	written agreements placed on file and dated
			at least 60 community groups reach probationary licence	provide information and advice as required	supply accurate information, advice, support and guide community groups through the process to reach probationary licence	all licence ready centres meet the establish Licence and Chartering Protocol agreed between the Ministry and ECD
			at least 55 community groups obtain full licensing and chartering	assist in preparation of written licensing plan and application assist with development of charter and management plan monitor, review and report at each stage Inform MOE of centres ready for licensing visit survey centres on level of satisfaction on advice & support given	supply accurate information, advice, support and guide community groups through the process to reach full licence and chartering	new centres meet standard in excess of those required by legislation to the Ministry's satisfaction

output	Service Area	Outcome (purpose)	Output (product/target)	Method Case	Key performance indicators	Quality indicators
			at least 60 community groups supported to Discretionary Grants Funding (DGF)	advise relevant groups on process for obtaining DGF support groups on process for obtaining DGF ensure eligibility for DGF Provide written feedback to all groups worked with about their readiness for DGF.	advice and information give to community groups about the DGS application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > good quality and accurate advice is given > 100% of groups which have an application supported by ECD to apply for Discretionary Grants Funding are fully eligible > all community groups work with receive written feedback about their readiness to become a licenced and chartered service
			at least 10 community groups receiving 30-50 hours At Risk Centres Intervention Strategy	work with At Risk centres identified by MOE. provide advice and guidance to address all non-compliance issues. aim to restore centre to full licence status.	centres who have been placed on provisional licences are worked with by ECD to address the non compliance issues identified by the Ministry in an attempt to assist these centres to return to full licence status	
			report quarterly (giving breakdown of general, Maori and Pacific numbers on community groups worked with in the following way: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > reaching probationary licence; > reaching full licence and chartering; > applying for DGS; > receiving the At Risk Centres Intervention” respond to 10-20 queries on early childhood education and parenting	record numbers of centres serviced, and extent of services provided in all of the categories, report information to MOE in quarterly reports. identify trends and issues in reports.	report quarterly to the Minister and send a copy to the Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > good quality and accurate reports are provided within the agreed timeframes > quarterly reports include a summary table of the results achieved per quarter and cumulatively together with explanations of any variances

APPENDIX II

OUTPUT 2B: LICENCE EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

output	Service Area	Outcome (purpose)	Output (product/target)	Method	Key performance indicators	Quality indicators
2b	Licence Exempt Playgroups (general, Nga Puna Kohungahunga and Pacific Island Early Childhood Centres)	children have the opportunity to have play experiences facilitated by their parents in a community based group environment that meets ECD quality criteria for playgroups	parents assisted to form a group in a community based location	<p>establish classification of groups and level of support required. Discuss with MOE this management plan within the first quarter</p> <p>assess case for establishment of new group based on parental/community commitment & existing ECE services support</p>	<p>needs Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - service provision description for categories of support - evaluation (on-going) of categories, provision & needs analysis 	quarterly report contains summary of actions.
			parents are facilitated to manage co-operative and flexible playgroups at a nominal costs	establishment of new groups and maintenance of existing services	playgroups are established and sustained.	a range of parents participate in the running of playgroups. Playgroups have a life span of no less than two years.
			up to 800 playgroups (including Nga Puna Kohungahunga and Pacific Island Early Childhood Groups) may receive support.	<p>provide Administration Kit and advise on its use</p> <p>Provide Learning Environment Resource Kit and advise on its use</p> <p>Facilitate workshops on relevant issues</p> <p>Inform, promote, process and disburse DCF payments</p>	<p>80% of all types of groups (generally Maori and Pacific) groups will be using the Administration Kit within 12 months of setup.</p> <p>Within 12 months of setup: 50% of this group will be using the Learning Environment Kit</p>	by 4 th quarterly report targets are attained. Each quarterly report identifies needs that lead to the provision of more intensive support for some playgroups.
			at least 300 of these groups will receive more intensive support. at least 20% will be new groups.	<p>advise on merits and methods of obtaining and sustaining L & C status.</p> <p>Review ECD's involvement and report to MOE.</p>	at least 80% of the new groups will be using the Administration Kit.	regional trends and issues are specifically identified.
					<p>Report against management plan on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > movement towards licensing and chartering > levels of support being supplied to each category 	100% of eligible groups receive Developing Centres Funding with amount allocated for this purpose.

APPENDIX II

ECD DOCUMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY 2000-2001 LICENCE-EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

APPENDIX III

STUDY INSTRUMENTS

Programme Logic Interview Questions for National ECD and Ministry of Education Staff 27/07/01

(N.B. Interviewees may choose whether we deal with the two evaluation areas separately or together during the course of the interview.)

- > 1. How would you describe –
 - i) ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support to someone who knows nothing about it?
 - ii) ECD's advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups?
- 2. What do you think are the short term goals of licensing and chartering advice and support? Long term goals?
- 3. What do you think are the short term goals of advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups? Long term goals?
- 4. What impact do you think licensing and chartering advice and support has had for those ECD have worked with? Why?
- 5. What impact do you think advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups has had on the playgroups and those involved in them? Why?
- 6. What do you think ECD does to achieve the delivery of the licensing and chartering advice and support?
- 7. What do you think ECD does to deliver advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups?
- 8. What would be the signs for you that ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support is successful?
- 9. What are the factors within ECD that help it to be successful?
- 10. What are the factors outside ECD that hinder it? (e.g. funding etc)

11. What would be the signs for you that ECD's advice and support to licence-exempt playgroups is successful?
12. What are the factors within ECD that help it be successful?
13. What are the factors outside ECD that hinder it? (e.g. community resources etc)
14. In general, what do you think ECD has achieved so far in its work on licensing and chartering, and with licence-exempt playgroups?
15. What contribution has this work made to early childhood education, parental support, community development?
16. What could enhance or endanger ECD's future provision?
17. If you could plan ECD's services all over again, is there anything you would do differently? Why?
18. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Programme Logic Interview Questions for Regional ECD Staff

Licensing and chartering advice and support

1. How would you describe ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support to someone who knows nothing about it?
2. What work do you typically do with groups to deliver licensing and chartering advice and support? (Describe all the stages, areas of work and resources). How do you decide which groups to work with in this way? Do you turn any groups away? (If yes, about how many and why in the last year?)
3. What do you think are the short term goals of licensing and chartering advice and support? Long term goals? Do these goals differ for different groups? If yes, why?
4. What would be the signs for you that ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support is successful?
5. What impact do you think licensing and chartering advice and support has had for those groups ECD have worked with? (Probe for quality, for parent involvement and support, for the main factors that enable a group to become licensed and chartered). Why? What keeps the groups involved in the process?
6. What do you see as the barriers that prevent groups from becoming licensed and chartered? Do you think all groups should become licensed and chartered?
- >
7. What are the factors within ECD that help this programme to be successful?
8. What are the factors outside ECD that hinder this programme (e.g. funding)?
9. How do you and the Ministry of Education work together in this area.

Licence-exempt playgroups

10. How would you describe ECD's advice and support for licence exempt playgroups to someone who knows nothing about it?
11. What work do you typically do with playgroups to deliver advice and support? (Describe all the areas of work and resources). How do you decide which groups to work with in this way? Do you turn any groups away? (If yes, about how many and why in the last year?)

12. What do you think are the short term goals of advice and support to licence exempt playgroups? Long term goals?
13. What would be the signs for you that ECD's advice and support is successful?
14. What impact do you think ECD's advice and support has had for those ECD have worked with? (Consider: management, quality, environment and participation). Why?
15. What are the factors within ECD that help it to be successful with this programme?
16. What are the factors outside ECD that hinder it with this programme?

General questions for both provisions

17. In general, what do you think ECD has achieved so far in its work on licensing and chartering AND with licence-exempt playgroups?
18. What contribution has this work made:
 - to early childhood education?
 - to parental support?
 - to community development?
19. What could enhance or endanger ECD's future provision?
20. If you could plan ECD's services all over again, is there anything you would do differently? Why?
21. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Questions for parents about ECD support and advice

Licensing and chartering for centres/groups

1. (For groups) How long has your group been working with ECD to become licensed and chartered? Why do you want to be licensed and chartered? (For licensed centres: How long did your group work with ECD to become licensed and chartered? What if any contact have you had with them since?)
2. Over that time what advice and support have ECD staff given your group? (In getting answers to these questions find out what ECD did e.g. phone calls, left resources, held a workshop, looked at plans etc).

About quality and the early childhood curriculum?

About the Early Childhood Regulations, staffing and ways in which you could organise your centre?

About costs, budgeting and fees or donations from parents?

About management, e.g. being an employer, developing centre policies, how you can set up a management committee and what everyone's role is?

About buildings and playground design, getting resource consent and applying for the discretionary grant?

3. What impact has the advice and support had on your centre/group?

On the quality of your programme?

On administration of your centre/group?

On the centre/group environment?

On support for parents?

On whether families want to take part?

(For groups only) On your decisions about whether you want to be licensed and chartered?

4. What do you think ECD is trying to achieve through its licensing and chartering advice and support?
5. What would be the signs for you that ECD's licensing and chartering advice and support is successful?
6. Do you have any suggestions about how ECD could improve their advice and support?

7. Is there anything else you think that ECD could be doing that they don't do now?
8. (For groups only) What, if anything, makes it hard for you to become licensed and chartered? What do you think would prevent you from becoming licensed and chartered?
9. (For centres only) Looking back, what were the hardest things about becoming licensed and chartered? If you could do it again, is there anything you would do differently now?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about the work of ECD?

Questions for parents about ECD support and advice

Licence-exempt playgroups

1. How long has your playgroup been working with ECD? About how often do you have contact with them? What sort of contact is this?
2. Over that time what advice and support have ECD staff given your playgroup? (In getting answers to these questions, find out how ECD did this, e.g. left resources, held a workshop, visited, made a phone call).

About ways parents can work with children?

About quality and the early childhood curriculum?

About managing your playgroup?

About playground and building layout and equipment?

About other things?

3. What do you think ECD is trying to achieve through its advice and support?
4. What would be the signs for you that ECD's advice and support is successful?
5. What impact has the advice and support had on your playgroup?

On the quality of the programme?
On the administration of your playgroup?
On the playgroup environment?
On support for parents?
On whether families want to take part?
6. Do you think playgroups do important things for children? If yes, what are these?
7. Do you think playgroups do important things for parents? If yes, what are these?
8. Do you have any suggestions about how ECD could improve their advice and support and the way they work?
9. Is there anything else you think that ECD could be doing for your playgroup that they do not do now?
10. Have you thought about becoming licensed and chartered? If yes, what decisions have you made so far and why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to say about ECD support and advice?

APPENDIX IV

INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORM

EVALUATION OF TWO ECD SERVICES: LICENSING AND CHARTERING ADVICE AND SUPPORT, AND LICENCE-EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

Information Sheet for ECD Staff

The Ministry of Education has asked the New Zealand Council for Educational Research to carry out an evaluation of two Early Childhood Development (ECD) services: Licensing and Chartering advice and support, and advice and support to License Exempt Playgroups. The evaluation is looking at the quality and outcomes of ECD's work in these two areas.

NZCER is interviewing the following groups for this evaluation:

- Ministry of Education management centre staff in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to gather their views on the impact of the advice and support provided by ECD and explore such issues as the barriers that prevent centres from becoming licensed;
- ECD regional staff in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Northland to examine ECD's work to assist centres to reach licensing requirements and their work to support and advise license-exempt playgroups, and to gather their views on the impact of this work and what helps and hinders it; and
- Staff and parents involved in licensed and chartered centres, and parents or other adults responsible for license-exempt playgroups to find out about how ECD supports them, the impact of ECD's work and any suggestions for change.

Most of the interviews will be group interviews.

Our evaluation will be useful for suggesting ways in which ECD's work can develop and ECD's links with the Ministry of Education can be strengthened.

If you agree to take part in the interview you can withdraw at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. You will not be personally identified in any report we write. All documents will be destroyed when the data has been gathered and no copies will be made.

If you have any further questions about this interview please contact Linda Mitchell at NZCER by phone (04) 802 1443 or by e-mail on linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz.

EVALUATION OF TWO ECD SERVICES: LICENSING AND CHARTERING ADVICE AND SUPPORT, AND LICENCE-EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

Information Sheet for Ministry of Education Staff

The Ministry of Education has asked the New Zealand Council for Educational Research to carry out an evaluation of two Early Childhood Development (ECD) services: Licensing and Chartering advice and support, and advice and support to License Exempt Playgroups. The evaluation is looking at the quality and outcomes of ECD's work in these two areas.

NZCER is interviewing the following groups for this evaluation:

- Ministry of Education management centre staff in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to gather their views on the impact of the advice and support provided by ECD and explore such issues as the barriers that prevent centres from becoming licensed;
- ECD regional staff in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Northland to examine ECD's work to assist centres to reach licensing requirements and their work to support and advise license-exempt playgroups, and to gather their views on the impact of this work and what helps and hinders it; and
- Staff and parents involved in licensed and chartered centres, and parents or other adults responsible for license-exempt playgroups to find out about how ECD supports them, the impact of ECD's work and any suggestions for change.

Most of the interviews will be group interviews.

Our evaluation will be useful for suggesting ways in which ECD's work can develop and ECD's links with the Ministry of Education can be strengthened.

If you agree to take part in the interview you can withdraw at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. You will not be personally identified in any report we write. All documents will be destroyed when the data has been gathered and no copies will be made.

If you have any further questions about this interview please contact Linda Mitchell at NZCER by phone (04) 802 1443 or by e-mail on linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz.

EVALUATION OF TWO ECD SERVICES: LICENSING AND CHARTERING ADVICE AND SUPPORT, AND LICENCE-EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

Information Sheet for Parents/ Centre and Programme Staff

The Ministry of Education has asked the New Zealand Council for Educational Research to carry out an evaluation of two Early Childhood Development (ECD) services; Licensing and Chartering Advice and Support, and License Exempt Playgroups. The evaluation is looking at the quality and outcomes of ECD's work in these two areas.

We will be interviewing you to find out what you think about such things as the advice and support you have been given by ECD, the impact this has had on your group or programme, what you think ECD is trying to achieve, any suggestions you may have for improving the advice and support and your ideas on the benefits of being licensed and chartered.

We are also interviewing Ministry of Education management centre staff in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and ECD regional staff in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and Northland. You are welcome to invite other people (eg members of the management committee, staff or volunteers, families who use the programme) to the interview. All information will be strictly confidential and no group or programme will be identifiable in the final report.

All information gathered will be used to contribute to the ongoing development of ECD's work.

If you agree to take part in the interview you can withdraw at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. You will not be personally identified in any report we write. All documents will be destroyed when the data has been gathered and no copies will be made.

If you have any further questions about this interview please contact Linda Mitchell at NZCER by e-mail on linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz.

EVALUATION OF TWO ECD SERVICES: LICENSING AND CHARTERING ADVICE AND SUPPORT, AND LICENCE-EXEMPT PLAYGROUPS

Consent Form

- I understand I am being interviewed as part of an evaluation of two ECD services being undertaken by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- The reason for the research has been explained to me and I have had a chance to have any questions answered.
- I am taking part in the research voluntarily.
- I understand that I will not be identified in the report, although my comments may be outlined or quoted.
- **I agree to the interviewed being tape-recorded.**
- My signature below shows that I have read and understood this consent form and I have agreed to participate in the research.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____